

The Tower and London Bridge

STORIES FROM CHAUCER

RE-TOLD FROM

THE CANTERBURY TALES

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

by

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TO
MY FATHER AND MOTHER

PREFACE

THIS venture, to which I have been encouraged by the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press, is by no means the first of its kind. Tales from Chaucer have frequently been published before, but the plan of this little book is nevertheless to some extent new. Usually the tales have been given in an isolated form, and thus they lose much of their interest as part of a larger work. Here an attempt has been made to exhibit the general scheme and conduct of *The Canterbury Tales*, including the Prologue and some of the conversations of the pilgrims on the road, which form so interesting a feature of the original. It is hoped that the book may prove not a substitute for Chaucer but a help and encouragement to some young people who might otherwise be deterred from reading him by the slight preliminary difficulties of his language. It does not profess to be a close translation of Chaucer into modern English: the general sense is kept, but much is omitted, and sentences are often rearranged with a view to the requirements of a simple prose rendering.

Like all Chaucer students I am greatly indebted to the modern editors of the Canterbury Tales, especially Professor Skeat and Mr Pollard; and the Introduction owes something also to the interesting little book on Chaucer by M. Legouis, recently published in the series *Les grands écrivains étrangers*. Finally I must acknowledge my great obligations to my father for his constant help and guidance, and especially for his suggestions with regard to the Introduction and the Notes.

M. C. M.

October, 1911

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The figures of the Pilgrims are from the Chaucer Society's reprint of the Ellesmere MS. by kind permission of the Chaucer Society. The portrait on p. 194 is found in a manuscript of a poem by Hoccleve, a younger contemporary of Chaucer, who says that he had it painted to remind his readers of the features of his master, who is now dead.

INTRODUCTION

PROBABLY no English poet has had so great a variety of occupation in his life as Geoffrey Chaucer. He was the son of a London wine-merchant, and was born in the reign of Edward III, probably a little before the year 1340; we do not know the exact date of his birth, but we know that in 1357 he was a page in the household of Lionel, Duke of Clarence, third son of Edward III; for in some fragments of a book of household accounts there appears one item of seven shillings paid for a costume for Geoffrey Chaucer, consisting of a short cloak, a pair of red and black breeches, and shoes; and we know that in 1359 he was old enough to bear arms, for he then accompanied the King in his campaign in France, and was taken prisoner by the French, but soon ransomed. During the greater part of his life he was employed in the service of the Crown in various capacities, and in 1367 the King granted him an annual pension of twenty marks (about £200

in present value) for his services as valet of his chamber. Meanwhile he had married, but we know little about his wife, except that her name was Philippa, and that she was employed in the royal household; but there is some reason to believe that she was a sister of Katharine Swynford, afterwards married to John of Gaunt. Between 1370 and 1380 Chaucer was repeatedly employed in diplomatic services abroad, and especially it must be noted that in 1372 he was sent to Genoa to discuss arrangements with regard to the trade of Genoese merchants with England, an appointment for which he was probably recommended by his knowledge of Italian; after his return from this mission, in 1374, the King granted him a pitcher of wine daily, which was afterwards commuted for a pension. In the same year Chaucer was appointed Comptroller of the Customs of Wool and Leather in the Port of London, which post he held till 1386, residing in the house over the gate of Aldgate, which he leased from the City of London on condition only of keeping it in repair.

Edward III died and was succeeded by Richard II in 1377; but Chaucer retained his post, and in 1378, after having been sent on missions to Flanders and to France, he accompanied Sir Edward Berkeley to Lombardy

to treat with Bernabò Visconti, Lord of Milan, of whose tragic death he afterwards wrote in the Monk's Tale. On this journey he may have met the Italian poet Petrarch, of whose genius he wrote with so much appreciation in the Clerk's Tale. In 1382 he was appointed Comptroller of the Petty Customs of the Port of London in addition to his other office; in 1385 he became a Justice of the Peace for Kent; and in 1386 he sat in Parliament as Knight of the Shire for the same county. But in that year his fortunes declined. He lost both his comptrollerships, perhaps for political reasons, and for three years he must have been in straits for money. In 1389, however, he was appointed Clerk of the Works at Westminster and in the next year also at St George's Chapel, Windsor, and from time to time he held other posts with various duties. The subsequent years of his life were passed in alternations of poverty and of prosperity; several grants by way of pension were made to him at various times, in acknowledgement of his services, by the King or by John of Gaunt, who seems to have been his special protector; and in the last year of his life his pensions were added to by John of Gaunt's son, who had just succeeded to the throne as Henry IV; this was doubtless in reply to the appeal made by the poet in the

Envoy of the balade 'To his Purse,' complaining of its lightness.

Chaucer died in the year 1400, on October 25th, as the inscription on his tomb records. His burial in Westminster Abbey was determined by the fact that he had died in the immediate neighbourhood, having lately taken the lease of a house near the Chapel of St Mary, Westminster; but the position of his tomb has been the occasion for the burial of other poets and men of letters in that side-aisle. A long line of poets, beginning with Spenser, Beaumont, and Ben Jonson have been laid near him there, and the place is now universally known as Poet's Corner.

It will be seen that Chaucer led a life of very various activity, and had great opportunities of meeting people of all classes and coming into contact with many kinds of business; his connections with the Court, with diplomacy, and with trade gave him wide opportunities for the observation of men and manners. Considering the variety and extent of his occupations, it is remarkable that he should have found time to produce so much valuable literary work. In the *House of Fame* he tells us how he used to come back from the account-books at his office, and at once sit down to another kind of book, over which he pored till

he felt quite dazed, and so at home led the life of a hermit, and had no time to see anything of his neighbours. But his life, in fact, was anything but that of a hermit. He tells us in the *Legend of Good Women* how the coming of the month of May had always power to make him throw aside his books and hasten out into the fields, to stretch himself upon the grass and greet the daisies which he loved so much. His interest in books, too, was balanced by his acquaintance with human life in many aspects, and as this developed his work became more original and interesting.

At first he naturally followed French models in poetry. The French language was still to some extent the language of the English Court, and French literature was familiar to all men of culture. One of Chaucer's earliest works was a translation of the famous *Roman de la Rose*, the great example in the fourteenth century of allegorical love poetry; and the poems which belong to his first period of work are all more or less in the style of the French poets of the day. The most noteworthy of these early poems is the *Book of the Duchess*, written on the occasion of the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, the first wife of John of Gaunt, in 1369. But before long another literary influence of the greatest importance

began to affect his work, and in respect of this he stands alone among the English poets of his day. He had become acquainted with Italian literature. Culture was far more advanced in Italy at this time than in any other country of Europe, and no poetry had been produced in any modern language which could for a moment be compared with that of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Chaucer no doubt knew Italian before he went to Italy: there were plenty of opportunities of learning the language from Italian merchants and others in London; but the opportunity of making acquaintance with Italian literature was not easily found except in Italy, and Chaucer probably took advantage of his employment abroad to acquire a certain number of Italian books, among which must have been copies of Boccaccio's most celebrated poems, the *Teseide* and the *Filostrato*, and probably also of Dante's *Commedia*. In any case we find that about this time his work is full of the influence of this literature. *The House of Fame* is an allégorical poem, which contains many reminiscences of Dante, and *Troilus and Criseyde*, in which Chaucer's narrative power and observation of human character appear fully for the first time, is founded almost entirely upon Boccaccio's *Filostrato*.

Almost at the same time was written the story

of Palamon and Arcite, which was afterwards used in *The Canterbury Tales*. But though these stories are thus borrowed, they are immensely improved in many respects by Chaucer, especially in the matter of character drawing.

In the *Parlement of Fowles* Chaucer returns to allegory, apparently to celebrate the betrothal of King Richard II in 1382; and a few years later came the *Legend of Good Women*, a collection of stories about women who had been martyrs in the cause of love, possibly written at the Queen's request; in any case it was intended for presentation to her, and celebrates her goodness in the character of the perfect wife, Alcestris. This collection of stories was left unfinished, no doubt because Chaucer had conceived the plan of a work which pleased him better, that which was to be his masterpiece, though destined also to remain unfinished, *The Canterbury Tales*. He had several stories already written, and he conceived the idea of including these and others in a framework which would serve to display characters of almost all the various types which the society of the time in England afforded. He chose an occasion which united men of all classes and characters, and brought them out on to the open road to exhibit their characters in conversation and to tell their stories.

Pilgrimages were journeys made ostensibly with a religious object, usually to the shrine of some saint, and were extremely popular in the fourteenth century; sometimes they were undertaken as a penance at the command of a priest, sometimes in hopes of miraculous healing, sometimes in fulfilment of a vow, sometimes as a thank-offering, as in the case of the Knight in *The Canterbury Tales*. But a pilgrimage was not so solemn an occasion in the England of the fourteenth century that mirth and jollity were banished from it; and to many people it was an opportunity for travel and social intercourse rather than a religious enterprise.

Wycliffe and his followers condemned pilgrimages, as leading to gossip, ribaldry, and extravagance; a Lollard on trial before Archbishop Arundel said of those who went on pilgrimages: 'They will...have with them both men and women that can well sing country songs, and some other pilgrims will have with them bag-pipes; so that every town that they come through, what with the noise of their singing, and with the sound of their piping, and with the jangling of their Canterbury bells, and with the barking out of dogs after them, that they make more noise, than if the king came there away, with all his clarions and many other

minstrels. And if these men and women be a month out in their pilgrimage, many of them shall be an half year after great janglers, tale-tellers, and liars.' But in spite of such denunciations, pilgrimages retained their popularity; and no shrine in England was more visited than the tomb of St Thomas of Canterbury.

Apart from its great poetical and literary merits, *The Canterbury Tales* forms a wonderful commentary upon English life in the Middle Ages. The group of pilgrims described in the Prologue is an unequalled picture of the society of Chaucer's time: here are some thirty persons belonging to the most different classes; the Knight and his son the Squire represent chivalry; the Doctor, Man of Law, Clerk of Oxford, and the poet himself the liberal professions; agriculture in its various branches is represented by the Franklin, the Reeve, and the Ploughman; handicrafts by the Wife of Bath and the five guildsmen; the secular clergy are represented by the Parson; the monastic orders by the rich Benedictine Monk, the elegant Prioress with her priest and chaplain, and the mendicant Friar, while other hangers-on of the Church appear in the persons of the Summoner and the Pardoner. To us this introduction of characters from real life into

fiction is familiar enough; but in the literature of Chaucer's age it was a novelty almost without precedent, and for the first time brought the dramatic element into the delineation of character; the pilgrims are real people, their thoughts are such as they might really have had, their words such as they might really speak. Chaucer has made a direct transcription from common life; and, since ordinary things and ordinary people are the most representative, he has provided an invaluable document for those who wish to call up the social life of the time. He does not attempt to chronicle contemporary events, nor concern himself with politics or public questions; he lived, it is true, in stirring times; he had fought under Edward III in the wars with France; he had seen England devastated by the Black Death; he had seen the Peasants' Revolt. It was a time of unrest both at home and abroad; the English Court was split into factions by the struggles between the great nobles who surrounded the King; the Church was being fiercely attacked by Wycliffe and his followers for her abuses and misrule. The contemporary poems of Langland and of Gower are full of political satire upon the social evils of their times; but Chaucer, like his pilgrims, is more interested in his own concerns and in his neighbours than in the

King and his favourites, in wars, or in civil and religious questions. His characters, like the majority of people in all times, are wrapped up in their own affairs, and untroubled by the storms around them, except in so far as their private interests are touched. Nevertheless, they are distinctive of their time and country. The Yeoman with his great bow and well-trimmed arrows calls up the English archers who played so redoubtable a part at Crécy and at Poitiers; the Knight, his master, stands for the finest chivalry of the Crusades; above all the clergy are characteristic of their time. Here, painted from the life, are the actual men whose vices and corruption Wycliffe and his followers denounced so vehemently. Chaucer does not denounce them; he portrays them, for good or bad, with a tolerance, humour, and impartiality of which Wycliffe would not have been capable. There is a kind of ironic approval in his description of the hunting Monk, with his furred sleeves and supple boots; he cannot withhold a tinge of admiration for the cleverness and fine language of the begging Friar; he admits that the Pardoner, for all his lying and cynicism, makes a fine figure in the pulpit; even the Summoner, who abuses his powers to extort blackmail from evildoers, is a goodnatured fellow in his way. This attitude of toleration carries more

conviction than the denunciations of a moralist ; here are the men as they really were ; this is the monastic and ecclesiastical system of the fourteenth century in actual being. Of course there is the shining exception of the parish Priest, who stands out in brighter relief in contrast to the rest, winning our affection by his holiness and unworldliness ; but it is a significant touch that, although he is perfectly orthodox, he is at once taunted with being a Lollard when he rebukes the host for his profane language ; a true son of the Church, it seems, might be expected to allow profanity to pass unchecked. All this belongs to Chaucer's own time, as well as the curious mixture of devotion and cynicism which marks the attitude of the ordinary layman towards religion. It was an age of devotion ; churches and religious houses were being built and richly endowed, pilgrimages, processions, miracle plays and preachings were the most popular entertainments of the day ; but it was also an age of vice and coarseness ; the standard of morality, both among the clergy and laity, was low ; and this also is reflected both in the characters of the pilgrims and in the easy toleration with which Chaucer refers to their vices. Charges of dishonesty, hypocrisy, drunkenness and sensuality recur with a frequency which becomes monotonous ;

several of the stories told are objectionably coarse in tone and subject, and the pilgrims raise no protest. In spite of a few bright exceptions, the reader is left with a sense that a society which could tolerate such characters and let such conversation pass, must have had a regrettably low standard of decency and morality.

Chaucer, then, is one of the greatest of realists. His intense interest in the many-coloured pageant of life made exact description easy to him, and he holds up a faithful mirror to the society round him. Everything is important to him, down to the minutest details of dress; the Prioress' coral rosary with its green gaudies, the Wife of Bath's scarlet stockings, the embroidered coat of the gay young Squire, and the Knight's doublet, blackened by his armour.

Just as real life provided Chaucer with his characters, contemporary literature provided him with his stories. None of the tales told by his pilgrims are invented by himself, though many of the details are his own. He took the stories popular in his time; and this adds to the naturalness of the whole, since the pilgrims were not asked to invent, but only to re-tell stories. Chaucer, as we have seen, had read widely, and the sources of his tales are as various as the characters of those who tell them.

The Knight's Tale is based upon Boccaccio's *Teseide*, the Man of Law's Tale upon the Anglo-Norman Chronicle of Nicholas Trivet, the Clerk of Oxford's Tale is from Petrarch, the Nuns' Priest's Tale from a French fable. But the sources of the stories are comparatively unimportant. Chaucer has made them his own by re-telling them with the freshness, humour, and pathos which belong to his own genius.

Chaucer at first intended each of his pilgrims to tell two stories at least, if not four; but he died leaving *The Canterbury Tales* unfinished, and they do not all tell even one. The order of the tales varies somewhat in different manuscripts, and we do not know exactly how they were meant to be distributed over the days occupied by the journey, though notes of time and place are thrown in occasionally in the course of conversation. The journey from London to Canterbury, as undertaken by such a company as this, would occupy certainly three or four days. They would ride at a foot's pace, those in front constantly having to wait for those behind, and they would sometimes have to go round to avoid some bad portion of the track, for fourteenth century roads left much to be desired, and we are reminded more than once of the danger of getting into a slough. The distance is about fifty-six miles, and we know

that travellers often halted for the night at three places on the road, Dartford, Rochester, and Ospringe, making fifteen miles a day for three days, and about ten miles for the fourth. The distribution of the tales in the present volume is that which is now commonly assumed, except that the Doctor's and Pardoner's are kept in the position which they hold in the manuscripts, from which they have been moved by modern editors.

THE PROLOGUE

WHEN April showers have pierced the drought of March, moistening each root, and bathing the veins of every plant so that the flowers begin to bud ; when the sweet breath of the west wind has called forth tender shoots in every holt and heath, and the little birds make melody, never closing their eyes all night for joy of the spring ; then men are stirred with longing to go on pilgrimage and to seek strange lands. Many are the distant shrines to which they journey ; and above all, from every shire's end in England, they make their way to Canterbury, to visit the shrine of the holy and blessed martyr St Thomas, who has aided them when they lay sick.

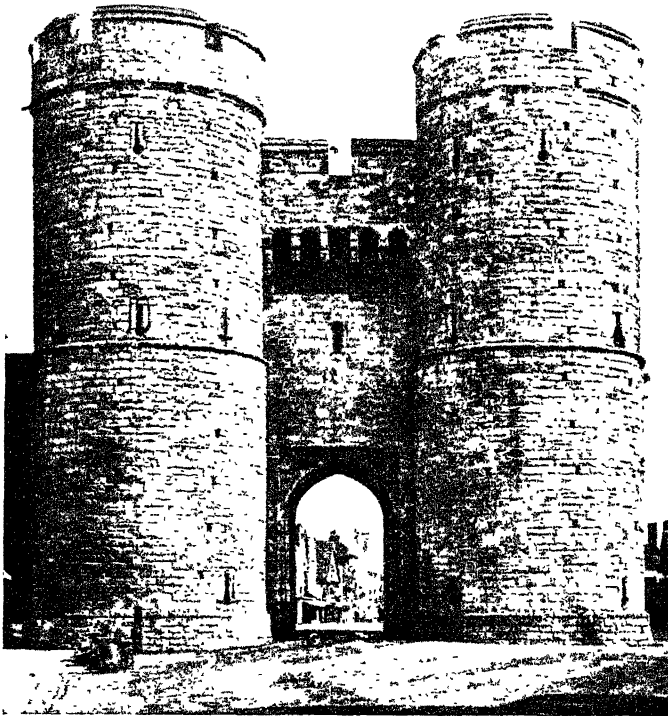
It chanced that on a certain day in April I had taken lodging at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, ready to set forth with devout intent upon my pilgrimage to Canterbury, when there came to the same hostelry at

nightfall a company of nine-and-twenty travellers, whom chance had thrown together, all pilgrims bound for Canterbury, like myself. The rooms and stables of the inn were spacious, the entertainment was of the best, and, not to make more words, that same evening I talked with them all, and joined myself to their company, agreeing to rise early and take the road with them.

But before I go further with my tale I think it well to set down a description of each of the pilgrims, telling you who they were, and what was their rank, and how they were equipped.

To begin, then, there was a Knight, a gallant man, who from the time when he first rode forth to fight had been a lover of chivalry, of truth and honour, liberality and courtesy. He had fought worthily for his king, and was renowned also for his prowess in distant lands, both Christian and heathen. He had made expeditions in Lithuania and in Russia, no knight of his degree so often; and many a time in Prussia he had sat at the head of the table above all the knights of other nations there. In Africa, in Turkey, and in Armenia he had harried the infidel; he had been at the sieges of Alexandria, of Granada and of Algezir, and had taken part in fifteen deadly

battles. Thrice he had fought for our faith
in the lists at Tramyssene, and each time slain



The West Gate, Canterbury

his foe. Everywhere he had won renown; and
though he was so worthy, yet was he modest,
and as gentle in his manners as a maiden.

Never in all his life had he spoken to anyone a discourteous or unseemly word. He was indeed a very perfect, gentle knight. For his



The Knight

equipment, his horses were good, but he himself was not gaily dressed. His doublet was of plain fustian, all blackened by the marks of his armour, for he had lately come

back from the wars, and was making his pilgrimage in thanksgiving for his safe return.

With him rode his son, a young Squire of twenty years of age. He was a curly-haired youth, of middle height, wonderfully strong and



The Squire

active, who had seen service in Flanders and in France, and had acquitted himself well, hoping thereby to win his lady's love. His gown was short, with sleeves long and wide, brodered all over like a field of red and white flowers. He was as fresh as the month of May, singing

and playing on the flute all day long; a good rider, and an ardent lover, able to compose songs and to write poetry, to joust, to dance, and to draw. With all this he was courteous, humble, and serviceable, and carved before his father at table.

There rode with them one servant only, a Yeoman, clad in a coat and hood of green. Under his belt he bore a sheaf of arrows, sharp and bright, and plumed with peacocks' feathers, well trimmed so that they did not droop in their flight; and in his hand he carried a mighty bow. Well practised he was in all wood-craft, a good forester, as I should guess. His face was brown, his hair close cropped. He wore a gay bracer on his arm; a sword and buckler hung at his side, and a dagger, sharp and well mounted. On his breast was a bright silver brooch with the figure of St Christopher. He carried a horn slung to a green baldrick.

There was a Nun, too, a Prioress, with a quiet smile on her face, whose name was Madam Eglantine. Well able she was to chant the divine service, and she spoke French fairly and fluently, after the school of Stratford at Bow, for the French of Paris was unknown to her. If ever she swore, it was but by St Loy. Her manners were courteous, and at

table she took her food in a seemly fashion, letting no morsel fall from her lips, and dipping only the tips of her fingers in the sauce. She carried her food to her mouth so that not a drop fell upon her breast, and she wiped her lips so clean that no grease was to be seen in her cup after she had drunk.



The Prioress

Mirthful she was, too, and pleasant, though she cultivated a courtly bearing, and desired to be held worthy of reverence. Her heart was so kind and pitiful that she would weep if she saw a mouse caught in a trap. Some little dogs, too, she had, which she fed with roast meat, or milk and wastel bread; and sorely

she would weep if one of them died or were struck with a stick, so tender hearted was she, and full of feeling. This Prioress was tall, and had a fair, wide forehead; her eyes were grey, her nose well formed, and her mouth was



The Nuns' Priest

small, soft, and red. She wore a close-pleated wimple and a cloak neatly fashioned, and on her arm she carried a rosary of coral beads with green gawdies, from which there hung a clasp of gold with the device of a crowned 'A,' and below it the words, 'Amor vincit

omnia.' With her she had three priests, and another Nun, who was her chaplain.

Then there was a Monk, a handsome man, well fitted to be an abbot. He loved hunting, and had many a good horse in his stables.



The Monk

The bells on his bridle jingled in the wind as he rode, as clear and loud as the ringing of the chapel bell. The rule of St Benedict was too old-fashioned and strict for him, and in the house where he was Prior he let old things

go by, and held to the newer fashions of the world. It was little he cared for the saying that hunters are profane men, or that a monk out of his cloister is like a fish out of water. And I say that he was right. Why should he lose his wits poring over a book in a cloister, or labour with his hands as Augustine bids? Let Augustine work if he will; but it is not for such as these. Therefore this Monk was a hard rider, and kept swift greyhounds; for the hunting of the hare was his delight, and he would spare no cost for it. His sleeves were edged with fine and costly fur, and his hood was fastened with a gold pin adorned with a love-knot. His bald head shone like glass, and so too did his face, and his eyes were bright and roving. His boots were supple and his horse in fine condition and as brown as a berry. He was a goodly prelate beyond all doubt, well-favoured and ruddy; and a fat swan roasted was his favourite dish.

We had a jolly Friar with us, too, who in all the four orders had no equal for fair speech. He was a pillar of his order, well known and well beloved through all the countryside, and especially by the women; for by his licence he had greater power, he said, to hear confession and grant absolution than a parish priest; and for those who paid

liberally his penances were light; for, as he said, if a man gives to a poor order it is a sign that he is a true penitent; many, though they repent, are unable to weep for their sins because their hearts are so hard, and these instead of tears and prayers may give silver to the poor friars. His tippet was always stored with knives and pins to give away



The Friar

to women. He could play upon the lute and sing a merry song, with a lisp that made his English sweet upon the tongue; and when he played and sang, his eyes twinkled like stars on a frosty night. •His neck was as white as a lily, and he was as strong as a champion wrestler. He was courteous and lowly in service when he saw a chance of gain; a

man of wonderful powers, and the best beggar of his house. So pleasant was his greeting to the ear, that even though a poor widow had not a shoe to her foot, he would contrive to get a farthing from her before he left. He was well acquainted with the taverns in every town, and was more familiar by far with the inn-keepers than with the lepers and beggars. It was more fitting for a man of his worth to associate with the rich than with the poor; for what profit or advancement could the poor bring him? On love-days especially he was much in request, for then he was not like a poor scholar with a thread-bare coat, but his cope was of double worsted, as round as a bell, and he bore himself like a learned doctor, or like the Pope himself. This worthy limitour was named Hubert.

There was a Merchant, with a forked beard, who rode in a motley suit, and wore a Flemish beaver hat, and trimly buckled boots. His opinions on public affairs, which he delivered in solemn tones, all tended to the increase of his own gains. At all costs he desired that the sea should be well guarded between Middleburgh and Orwell, and on the exchange of French crowns he made good profit. So well did he use his wits in his bargains and his business, that no one knew it when he was

in debt. A worthy man he was in truth, but his name I cannot tell you.

There was a Clerk of Oxford also, long given to the study of logic. His horse was as lean as a rake, and he himself was not fat, but had a gaunt and sober look. His short cloak was



The Clerk of Oxford

threadbare, for as yet he had no benefice, and he was too unworldly to seek after office. He loved better to have at his bed's head twenty books of Aristotle's philosophy bound in red or black, than rich clothes, a fiddle, or a lute. Yet, though he was a philosopher, he had but

little gold in his coffers, and all that he could get from his friends he spent on books and on learning, praying diligently for the souls of those who gave him the means to study; for that was what he loved best. He spoke no word more than was needful, and all that he said was formal, brief, and pithy. All his speech



The Sergeant at Law

was full of virtue, and glad he was both to learn and to teach.

We had, moreover, a Sergeant at Law, a shrewd and learned man, full of wise words. He had often sat as Justice of Assize, and many were the fees and the robes which he had received by reason of his knowledge and

high repute. He was a great purchaser of land, and no entail or mortgage gave him trouble, nor could any flaw be found in his deeds. Never was there a busier man than he, and yet he seemed even busier than he really was. He could quote every case and judgement from the time of William the Conqueror till now, and all the statutes he knew by heart. He was dressed but plainly, in a coat of two colours, and had a girdle of silk with small bars upon it.

. With him there was a Franklin, with a ruddy face and a beard as white as a daisy. He was above all fond of good living, a true son of Epicurus, who held that perfect happiness consists in pleasure; and of a morning he dearly loved a sop in wine. His house was large and his hospitality great; he was a very St Julian in his own countryside. His bread and ale were always good, and better wine had no man than he. Baked fish and meats abounded in his house; and woe to the cook if the sauce were not well-seasoned or the cooking utensils ready! In his hall the table was spread all day, furnished according to the season; his coops held many a fat partridge, his fish-ponds many a bream and pike. He was chairman of the magistrates at sessions, and had been sheriff of the county, and more than a few

times knight of the shire. At his girdle there hung a dagger, and a purse of milk-white silk.

A Haberdasher and a Carpenter, a Weaver, a Dyer, and an Upholsterer were with us also, all clothed alike in the livery of a noble guild. Their apparel was smart and new, and their knives were not mounted with brass, but all with silver, finely wrought; each one seemed a fair burgess, fit both for wisdom and for wealth to sit as alderman at the high table in a Guildhall: and to this their wives too would make no objection; for it is pleasant to be called 'Madam,' and to go before the rest to vigils, with a mantle carried after you in royal fashion.

These men had a Cook with them for their journey, who could roast, boil and fry, bake good pies, and make forced meat with the best. Well did he know the taste of London ale.

In our company, too, there was a Shipman of the west country, from Dartmouth, for all I know. He rode upon a pack-horse as best he could, and his skin was burnt brown by the summer sun. He wore a stuff gown reaching to his knee, and a dagger slung by a cord about his neck. A good fellow he was, and many a draught of wine had he drawn from the cask on the voyage from Bordeaux, while the owner slept. His feelings were not over fine;

if he fought and gained the victory he threw his prisoners overboard, and sent them home by water. But for skill in seamanship he had not his equal upon the seas. He knew well how to reckon his tides and his currents, and was acquainted with every haven from Gothland to Finisterre. Bold he was, and prudent too, and his beard had been shaken by many a storm. His ship was called the 'Maudelaine.'

There was with us also a Doctor of Physic, well versed in astronomy, and skilful therefore in medicine and in surgery. In tending his patient he watched carefully for the right conjunction of the planets, and made images for him under a fortunate ascendant. A good practitioner he was, and knew the cause and remedy of every sickness. He had his apothecaries always at hand to supply drugs and syrups; for each made gain for the other, and their friendship was of long standing. He knew all the writers on medicine, from Esculapius to Gatesden, though in the Bible he read but little. In his diet he was sparing, eating only what was digestible and nourishing. His clothing was somewhat costly, of scarlet and dark blue, with lining of silk; but in his other expenses he was not lavish, and what he gained in time of pestilence he kept; for in physic gold is a cordial, and therefore he loved it well.

Then there was a good Wife from the country about Bath. She was somewhat deaf, which was a pity; but in clothmaking she surpassed the weavers of Ypres and of Ghent. She would let no woman in the parish go up



The Wife of Bath

before her to the offering in church; if any did so, her wrath put her out of all charity. Her face was bold and red, her teeth set far apart; and she sat easily upon an ambling nag, a foot-mantle about her broad hips, and a pair of sharp spurs on her feet. Her shoes were new

and supple, her hose of fine scarlet, closely tied; she wore a wimple, and a hat as broad as a buckler. The kerchiefs which she carried as her head-dress of a Sunday were of the finest, and weighed, I dare swear, ten pounds. Five husbands had she married at the church door, besides sweethearts in her youth, of whom we need say nothing; she had made pilgrimages to many distant lands, to Rome and to Boulogne, to Cologne, and to Saint James in Galicia, and to Jerusalem three times. In company she laughed and talked with the best. She was well acquainted, too, with the remedies for love, for that dance none knew better than she.

There was also a Parson of a parish, poor in worldly goods, but rich in holy thoughts and works; gentle, diligent, and patient in adversity; a learned man and a true preacher of the gospel of Christ. Full loath was he to lay a curse on those who failed to pay him their tithes; rather would he give to his poor parishioners out of the Church offerings and out of his own substance. A small pittance contented him; he was a true shepherd, and no hireling; and what he preached he first practised himself, setting a noble example to his flock. If gold rust, he was wont to say, what will iron do? If a priest be not virtuous,

no wonder if the ignorant lay people should do ill. He did not let out his benefice to hire, leaving his sheep stuck fast in the mire while he ran to London to seek a chantry at St Paul's and sing masses for souls, or to take service as the chaplain of a guild; but he dwelt at home, and guarded his flock against the wolf. His parish was wide, and the houses



The Parson

far apart, but he let no weather, neither rain nor thunder, keep him from visiting his parishioners, high or low; staff in hand, he would go to them on foot, however far away they lived. And, though he was so good himself, yet he was not harsh to sinners, but taught them with wise and gentle words, and tried to draw them heavenwards by his example, though



Ploughing

on occasion he could sharply rebuke one who was obstinate, whether of high or low estate. He claimed no reverence nor ceremony, but taught the doctrine of Christ and his Apostles, and followed it first himself.

With him there was his brother, a Ploughman, riding in a smock frock upon a mare. He was a good and true worker, who had carted many a load of manure; he lived in peace and charity with all men, loved God with his whole heart, alike in good times and in bad, and his neighbour as himself. On occasion he was ready to dig or thresh for a poor man without hire; and fully and fairly he paid his tithes.

There were besides a Reeve, a Miller, a Summoner, a Pardoner, a Manciple, and myself.

The Miller was a thick-set, short-necked, broad fellow, big in bone and muscle, who in wrestling matches always won the ram. He could break any door or lift it off its hinges by running at it with his head. His mouth was wide, his beard red as a fox and broad as a spade. He wore a white coat and a blue hood, and carried a sword and buckler by his side. He was a loud talker, and a teller of ribald tales; and clever at stealing corn, and taking three times his proper toll; but for all that

he had a thumb of gold. He was a good performer, too, upon the bagpipes, and with



Chaucer

these he played us out of town.

The Manciple was steward and caterer to one of the Inns of Court, and of him all

purchasers of victuals might take example; for, whether he paid ready money or bought on credit, he always made a good bargain for



The Manciple

himself. With all his lack of learning, his wit surpassed the learning of the lawyers who were his masters, and though a dozen of them at least were fit to be stewards to any lord in

England, yet this Manciple made fools of them all.

The Reeve was a slender man of choleric complexion, close shaven, with cropped hair shorn like a priest's, and his legs long and lean like sticks. He was a shrewd farmer, and knew by the weather how his crops would yield. Since his lord was twenty years of age he had had charge of all his stock, cattle, horses, sheep, swine, poultry, and dairy, and made a good profit for himself, though no auditor could prove his accounts at fault. He knew all the tricks of the herdsmen, labourers, and bailiffs, so that they feared him like death. His house was in a pleasant position on a heath, surrounded by green trees. He had enriched himself secretly at his lord's expense, and was able now to earn his gratitude by lending to him on occasion out of what was in fact his own. In his youth he had learnt a good craft, and was a skilful carpenter. Baldeswell in Norfolk was his native place. He wore a long blue surcoat, tucked up about him like a friar's; and he rode a dapple-grey called Scot, carrying a rusty blade at his side, and keeping himself always the hindmost of the company.

The Summoner had a fiery face, with small eyes, black brows, and a scanty beard. Children were frightened at his face, which was so blotched

and pimped that no remedy could amend it. Of all food and drink he loved best garlic; leeks, onions, and strong red wine; and when he was drunk, he would shout out like a madman, repeating tags of Latin, which he had picked up out of some law decree. He knew all the secrets of the young people of the diocese, and had them at his mercy. But he



The Summoner

was an easy-going knave, and for a quart of ale would wink at a good fellow's offences for a twelvemonth, and would bid him care nothing for the Archdeacon's curse, for it would touch his purse only, and not his soul. But in this I know well that he lied, for a guilty man should fear the curse of the Church, which has power to slay the soul, even as absolution saves it; and

a 'Significavit' is a serious matter. On his head he had set a garland big enough for an ale-house sign, and by way of a buckler he carried a great cake.

With him there rode a gentle Pardoner of Rouncival, his friend and comrade, newly come from Rome, who loudly sang the song, 'Come hither, love, to me!' the Summoner bearing him company with a bass like the blast of a trumpet. This Pardoner thought that he rode in the height of the fashion, his head bare save for his cap, his smooth yellow hair hanging loose about him like a hank of flax, spread out in thin locks over his shoulders. For greater freedom he wore no hood, but kept it packed up in his wallet, and rode bareheaded in his cap, in which he had fastened a vernicle. He had full and staring eyes, like a hare, a smooth face, and a small voice like the bleat of a goat. In front of him lay his wallet, stuffed full of pardons, all hot from Rome. From Berwick to Ware there was no such pardoner. For among the relics in his wallet was a pillow-case which he said was our Lady's veil, and a scrap, so he said, of the sail that St Peter had on his ship at the time when he walked upon the sea. He had moreover a metal cross set with stones, and some pigs' bones in a glass box. But whatever they were, with these

relics he could get more money in a country parish in the course of one day than the poor parson got in two months, and with his flattery and knavish tricks he fooled both priest and people. But for all that, to give him his due, he was a fine figure in church, and a good



The Pardoner

reader of lesson or story; but best of all he sang an offertory, for when this was done, he knew that he must preach the sermon, and polish up his tongue to get silver from the people, as he right well could; so he sang it out merrily and loud.

Now I have told you the number, the

rank, and the equipment of our company, and why it was assembled at this hostelry, the Tabard Inn, hard by the Bell in Southwark; and I must tell you further what we did that night, and afterwards of our journey, and the rest of our pilgrimage. But first I pray you of your courtesy that you blame me not for rudeness of speech, though I set down each man's words, seemly or unseemly, just as they were spoken; for you know as well as I do, that if a man undertakes to report a story, he must tell it as it was told, else he will be telling it untruly. I crave your pardon also if I have not here set down the company in their proper order of rank. My wit, as you will perceive, is small.

Our Host made us good cheer, and set us down to supper, serving us with victuals of the best. The wine was strong, and we drank right willingly. A fine comely man was our Host; there was no fairer burgess in Cheapside; a stout fellow, with bright eyes, bold in speech, wise and manly, and a merry man withal, as he proved that evening. For after supper, when we had paid our reckonings, he began to talk and jest with us, and presently he thus addressed the company:

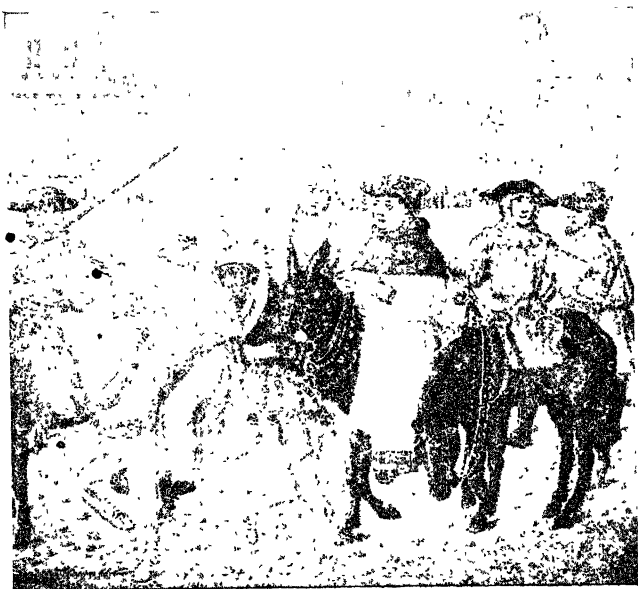
‘My masters, you are right heartily welcome, for by my troth I have not this year past seen

so merry a company together in this hostel as is now assembled here. Fain would I further your pleasure if I knew how; and I have thought just now of a game which will cost you nothing. You are bound for Canterbury,—God speed you, and the blessed Martyr reward you! And well I know that you will beguile the time upon your journey with tales and jesting, for there is neither pleasure nor profit in riding together dumb as stones. Now, I have a plan which will make sport for you all; and if you are willing to abide by my judgement and do as I say, I vow by my father's soul you shall be merry! Hold up your hands if you agree, without more ado!’

We did as he desired, and bade him say on.

‘Listen, then,’ said he, ‘my plan is this; each of you on the journey to Canterbury shall tell two tales, and two more upon the homeward road. And whichever of you shall tell the best stories shall have a supper at the cost of us all here in this house when we return. And to make you the merrier I propose to ride with you myself and be your guide and the judge of your tales; moreover, whichever of you shall refuse to accept my ruling shall pay all that we spend upon the road. If you consent to my plan, let me know at once, and I will prepare for the journey without delay.’

Our consent was gladly given; we begged him to do as he proposed, to be our ruler and the judge of our tales, and to provide a supper at a certain price, promising to abide by his decision in all things. Then the wine was



A Party of Pilgrims

brought in, and having drunk we went to rest.

At daybreak on the morrow our Host rose early, and, having roused us all, gathered us together in a flock; and forth we rode at a foot's pace, till we came to the watering-place

of St Thomas; and there our Host reined in his horse.

‘My masters,’ he said, ‘remember your agreement. If your song this morning be the same as it was last night, we will now see who is to tell the first tale; and whoever rebels against my decision shall pay every penny we spend on the journey, else may I never drink wine or ale again! Draw lots now, before we go further, and he that draws the shortest shall begin. Draw now, my lord Sir Knight; come you near, my lady Prioress; and you, Sir Clerk, lay aside your bashfulness; draw, all of you.’

The whole company obeyed him, and the lot fell to the Knight, a result which pleased us all; and he readily consented to fulfil his engagement.

‘I bid the lot welcome,’ he said, ‘and since I am to open the game, let us ride on, and listen all of you to what I shall say.’

Upon that we rode forward, and with a cheerful face he began his story.

THE FIRST DAY

THE KNIGHT'S TALE OF PALAMON AND ARCITE

LONG ago, old stories tell us, there lived a prince called Theseus, who was lord of Athens, and the mightiest conqueror under the sun. Among the many rich kingdoms which he won by his knightly valour was Scythia, the country of the Amazons. After fierce warfare he conquered the whole realm, wedded Hippolyta, the fair and valiant queen, and brought her with her young sister Emily home with him to Athens.

Riding thus amid all his host in great pomp and splendour, with music and triumph, the prince drew near to Athens, and he had nearly reached the city when he saw kneeling two by two before him in the highway a company of ladies, clothed in black. There rose from them a great cry of lamentation, from which they ceased not till they had caught his bridle rein.

‘Who are you,’ Theseus asked, ‘who trouble my home-coming with lamentation? Are you envious of my glory, that you weep so bitterly? Or who has injured you? Tell me your wrong, and whether it may be righted, and why you are thus clothed in black.’

The eldest lady of the company made answer, with a death-like countenance which was piteous to behold.

‘My lord, to whom fortune has given victory, it is through no envy of your glory that we weep, but we beseech your help and mercy. Of your gentleness let fall one drop of pity upon us wretched women. For of a truth, my lord, there is not one of us but has been a duchess or a queen, though now, thanks to the wheel of Fortune, you see us poor and miserable. For these fourteen days past we have awaited your coming, here in the Temple of Pity. Now, lord, help us, for it is within your power.

‘I, wretched woman that I am, was once wife to King Capaneus, slain at Thebes, woe worth the day! And all we of this woeful company lost our husbands in the siege of that city. And now old Creon, who, alas! is lord of Thebes, out of the hatred and wickedness of his heart has dishonoured the dead bodies of our lords, and will not allow them

to be buried or burned, but has cast them together in a heap that the dogs may devour them.'

With that they all fell flat on their faces to the ground, crying piteously, 'Have mercy upon us unhappy women, and let our sorrow soften your heart!'

Filled with pity for their sorrowful case the gentle prince leaped down from his horse, and raised them one and all from the ground, bidding them take comfort, and swearing, as he was a true knight, so to avenge them on the tyrant Creon that all Greece should ring with his punishment. Then straightway he unfurled his banner, and without more delay rode forth towards Thebes with all his host. Not even for half a day would he take rest, but slept that very night upon his road, sending Hippolyta the queen and her fair young sister Emily to await his return at Athens.

On his great white banner the armed figure of Mars shone red, blazoned on a glittering field, and beside the banner his pennon of rich gold was displayed, bearing the figure of the Minotaur whom he slew in Crete. Thus he rode amid all the flower of his chivalry, until he came to Thebes. There he fought with Creon, slew him in open battle like a good knight, and

put his army to flight. Then, having won the city by assault, he razed it to the ground, and restored to the ladies the bones of their dead lords, that they might give them honourable burial. Solemn were the rites at the funeral pyre, and great was the honour shown to these ladies by the noble Theseus at their departure. But all this would take too long to describe.

After the battle in which Creon was slain Theseus encamped all night upon the field, while the plunderers ransacked the heaps of dead, stripping them of their armour and their clothes. Now it happened that they found among the pile of dead two young knights, side by side, grievously wounded and lying between life and death. One was named Arcite, the other Palamon. Both were clad alike, in rich suits of armour, and by the armorial bearings upon their surcoats the heralds knew that they were of the blood royal of Thebes, and sons of two sisters. The plunderers drew them forth from the heap of slain and bore them gently to the tent of Theseus, who, refusing ransom, sent them to Athens to dwell in perpetual captivity. This being done, the prince, crowned with the laurels of victory, rode homeward with his host, and lived the rest of his days in happiness and honour.

In sorrow and anguish Palamon and his comrade Arcite dwelt captive in their tower, without hope of ransom or release. Thus day after day and year after year passed by, till it happened one May morning that Emily, who was fairer to behold than the lily on its green stem, and fresher than the May with all its flowers—for her bloom was like the rose, and I know not which was the fairer—had risen before break of day, as was her wont. For May endures no sluggards, but rouses every gentle heart from sleep, saying, ‘Arise and do me homage.’

Thus Emily arose to do honour to the May. Clothed in fair array, her yellow hair braided behind her in a tress a full yard long, she walked at sunrise up and down the garden, gathering red and white flowers to weave into a garland for her head, and singing like an angel in heaven.

Now the great tower which was the chief dungeon of the castle where the two knights lay in prison was close to the wall of the garden in which Emily was wandering. The sun was bright, the morning clear, and Palamon, the unhappy prisoner, was pacing as was his wont in a lofty chamber from which he could see all the noble city, and the garden with its green trees where Emily the fresh and fair was roaming.

This poor prisoner was pacing up and down, lamenting his miserable fate, when looking by chance through the iron-barred window he caught sight of Emily. At once he started and cried out, as though stung through the heart, and hearing his cry Arcite sprang up.

‘Cousin,’ he said, ‘what ails you that you look so pale? What is your trouble? For God’s sake, take our captivity with patience, for it cannot be remedied; fortune has laid this great adversity upon us; it is our fate, the stars decreed it at our birth; we must endure it, that is all.’

‘Cousin, you are mistaken,’ Palamon answered. ‘It was not because of our prison that I cried out. The cause of my grief is the beauty of the lady I see yonder walking in the garden. Whether she be woman or goddess I cannot tell, but truly she seems to me to be Venus herself.’ Then, falling upon his knees, he cried, ‘O Venus, if it be thy will thus to appear to me, a sorrowful and wretched creature, help us, I pray thee, to escape from this prison: but if we are doomed to die in captivity, have pity, at least, upon us who are brought so low through tyranny.’

Now as he spoke, Arcite also caught sight of Emily wandering to and fro, and his heart

was as sorely wounded as Palamon's by her beauty.

'I am slain,' he said, sighing piteously, 'by the fresh beauty of the lady who walks yonder. Unless I have her mercy and favour, so that I may at least look upon her, I am a dead man.'

At these words Palamon turned upon him fiercely.

'Speak you in earnest or in jest?' he asked.

'Nay, by my faith,' said Arcite, 'in earnest. God help me, I am in no mood to jest.'

Palamon knitted his brows.

'It were no great honour to you,' he said, 'to be false and a traitor to me, your cousin and sworn brother. For both of us are deeply sworn, never, though we die by torture, to hinder one another in love or any other matter till death parts us, but in every case to help each other. This was our oath, and you dare not deny it. Yet now you would be false to me, and love my lady, whom I love and serve, and ever shall until I die. Now this you shall not do. I loved her first, and told you of my trouble, as my friend and brother, sworn to help me, which you are bound as a true knight to do, so far as it lies within your power. Else you are a traitor, and this I dare maintain.'

'You yourself shall be a traitor first!' Arcite

answered proudly, 'Ay, and a traitor you are. For I was first her lover. You cannot deny it. You know not even yet whether she be woman or goddess. You worship her as a goddess, I love her as a woman. It was I therefore who told my love to you as to my cousin and sworn brother. But even supposing you had loved her first; know you not the old saying, Who shall give laws to a lover? Love is itself a greater law than any laid upon man, and mere human laws are broken every day for love. A man must needs love in spite of himself; he cannot help it. And indeed it is not likely that either you or I will ever stand in her favour, since we are doomed to perpetual imprisonment with no hope of ransom. We are like the two dogs fighting for the bone; they fought for it all day, and got nothing, for in the end a kite came and carried it away from them both. So, brother, each man for himself. Love if you will, for I love and ever shall, and that is the end of the matter. Here in this prison we must endure our lot, and each take what befalls him.'

Fierce and long was the strife between the two, had I time to tell of it:—but to the point. It happened one day that a good prince named Peirithous, who had been the friend of Theseus since their childhood, came to visit him at

Athens. For these two loved each other so dearly that, as old books tell us, when one died, the other went down to Hades to seek for him. But that tale I will not tell.

Now Peirithous had known Arcite for many years at Thebes, and loved him well, and at his entreaty Theseus released the young knight from prison without ransom, setting him free to go where he pleased, upon one condition, that if ever he were found in any land ruled over by Theseus he should lose his head.

No choice was left to Arcite but to depart. He went homeward with death at his heart, weeping bitterly and near to slaying himself in his despair. 'Alas that ever I was born!' he said. 'Now is my prison worse than before, since now I must dwell not in purgatory but in hell! Alas, that ever I knew Peirithous! For else I might still dwell with Theseus, fettered in his prison. Then had I been in bliss and not in woe; the sight alone of her whom I serve, though I might never win her favour, would have been enough for me. O Palamon, dear cousin,' he cried, 'yours is the victory in this adventure. You may be happy indeed in your prison. In prison? Nay, but in Paradise! For you have sight of her, while I, alas! am far away. And it is possible besides, since fortune is fickle, and you are a good and able knight,

that you may one day attain to your desire. But I, who am exiled, and deprived of all hope and comfort, had best die in despair. Alas! Why do we complain against Providence, by whose decrees we are so often granted a better fortune than any we can choose? We know not in our blindness what we pray for, and seeking after happiness we follow the wrong road. So it is with me, who thought that I should be in perfect bliss if I might escape from prison: but now I am exiled from all joy; my life is ended, since I may not see you, Emily.'

Palamon, on the other hand, when he knew that Arcite was gone, made such lamentation that the great tower rang with his clamour; the very fetters upon his mighty legs were wet with his bitter tears.

'Alas!' said he, 'my cousin Arcite, now is the prize of all our striving yours. You walk in liberty at Thebes, and give small heed to my woe. You may, since you are wise and valiant, gather together all our kindred, and make so fierce a war upon this city that by chance or by treaty you may win for your wife that lady for whom I am like to die. Great is your advantage over me, who must lie here in bondage, the woes of prison doubled by the pains of love.'

With this the fires of jealousy flared up

within him, seizing his heart so fiercely that he turned ashy pale.

‘O cruel gods!’ he cried, ‘that rule the world with your immutable decrees, what does mankind owe to you, more than the sheep cowering in the fold? For like any other beast man is slain, and even when guiltless he suffers imprisonment, sickness and adversity. What justice is there in your providence, which thus torments the innocent? And to increase man’s misery still more, he is bound to obey the law of God, and to refrain from his own desires, while the beasts may do as they please, and when they are dead suffer no more pain; but man has sorrow and torment after death. I know not the reason, but I see plainly that the world is full of wrong and pain; many a thief goes free, while I must lie in prison, tortured by jealousy and grief.’

The summer passed away, and with the long nights the pains both of the lover and the prisoner increased. In truth I know not which of the two was the more miserable; Palamon, condemned to perpetual imprisonment, yet able to see his lady day by day, or Arcite, free to go where he would, yet exiled on pain of death for evermore, so that never again might he behold his lady. To you who are lovers I leave the decision.

The Second Part

All this time Arcite in his exile at Thebes sorrowed for his lady. His grief was so great that he could neither eat, drink, nor sleep, so that he grew pale and thin and hollow-eyed. He was for ever alone; at the sound of music he would weep; he was so changed that his friends could not recognize his voice; and in all things he behaved like one who is melancholy mad.

After he had endured this cruel torment for a year or two, he dreamed one night as he lay asleep that the winged god Mercury stood before him, bidding him be merry. He bore his wand of sleep in his hand, and wore a hat upon his bright hair, as when he charmed Argus to sleep. 'To Athens,' he said, 'you shall go, and there your grief shall have an end.'

With that Arcite started from sleep. 'Now truly,' said he, 'to Athens I will go without delay; no fear of death shall keep me back from seeing my lady whom I love and serve. I care not if I die in her presence.' So saying he caught up a mirror, and when he saw how greatly he was changed by grief, it came into his mind that if he disguised himself he might live unknown at Athens and see his lady almost every day. So he changed his clothes,

dressing himself like a poor labourer, and all alone, save for a squire who knew his secret, he set out next day for Athens. Making his way to the palace he offered his services at the gate for any work which might be required, and was engaged by the chamberlain of Emily's household to hew wood and carry water, which, being young and strong and big boned, he was well able to do.

For a year or two he was thus employed as page of the chamber to the fair Emily, under the name of Philostrate. Never was anyone of his station so well beloved at court; so gentle was his bearing, so courteous his deeds and his speech, that his name became renowned, and in the course of time Theseus made him squire of his own chamber, giving him gold to maintain his degree. Thus for three years he lived unknown, bearing himself so well in peace and in war that Theseus held no man dearer than he. Let us now return to Palamon.

For seven years Palamon had lain in the darkness of his prison, tormented with love and sorrow. At last, in the seventh year of his imprisonment,—it was soon after midnight on the third night in May,—he succeeded with the help of a friend in breaking from prison, and fled from the city with all the speed he could. He had given his gaoler a draught of spiced

wine mixed with narcotics, so that even though men shook him he would not wake.

The night was short, and when it grew light he was obliged to hide himself. So he stole warily into a wood near by, meaning to lie hidden there all day, and when night came to make his way towards Thebes, where he would entreat the help of his friends to make war upon Theseus, for he was resolved either to win Emily to be his wife or to perish in the attempt.

Let us turn again to Arcite, who little knew how near he was to danger.

The busy lark, herald of the morning, greeted the grey dawn with her song, and the sun rose so brightly that the orient laughed with his light, and the silver dew-drops in the woods were dried up by his beams. And Arcite, chief squire in the royal court, having risen to do honour to the May, rode forth into the meadows on a fiery steed. When he had ridden a mile or two, he took his way by chance to the very wood where Palamon lay hidden, that he might gather himself a green garland of woodbine or hawthorn leaves. Loudly he sang in the bright sunshine a song of welcome to the May, and dismounting with a merry heart he roamed through the wood, passing close to the spot where Palamon, in terror of his life, lay

hiding. Little he guessed that Arcite was so near, and as little did Arcite know that his comrade was hidden close to him, within hearing of all his words.

When Arcite had roamed his fill and sung his roundelay, he sat down and fell into a brown study, after the strange fashion of lovers, whose spirits go up and down like buckets in a well, and change like the weather on a Friday. So no sooner had Arcite ended his song than he began to sigh, and to bewail his change of fortune.

‘Alas,’ said he, ‘that ever I was born! For I, who am of royal lineage, must needs be servant to my mortal enemy; I, who was once Arcite, must call myself Philostrate, and live unknown as one of low degree! And besides all this my heart is pierced by the fiery darts of love. It is by your eyes, Emily, that I am slain; it is for your sake I suffer; nor should I care for all my other troubles could I do you any pleasure.’

Palamon as he listened felt as though a cold sword had pierced his heart. He could no longer contain himself, but shaking with anger he leapt like a madman from the thick bushes where he lay hidden, and with a white face confronted Arcite.

‘Arcite, false and wicked traitor!’ he cried,

‘you who are my kinsman and sworn to help me, yet dare to love my lady; now you are trapped, and either you must die or I. For I am Palamon, your mortal foe; and though I have no weapon, being newly escaped out of prison, yet I will surely slay you here and now if you cease not from loving my lady. Choose which you will, for you shall not escape me!’

Arcite, hot anger at his heart, drew his sword fiercely.

‘By Heaven!’ he said, ‘if you were not sick and beside yourself for love, and weaponless moreover, you should never leave this wood alive! For I defy your claim. Know, fool, that love is free, and that I will love her in spite of all that you can do. But, since you are a true knight, and desire to do battle for her, I give you my word as a knight to meet you here to-morrow with all secrecy, bringing with me two suits of armour, of which you shall choose the better, leaving the worse for me. To-night, too, I will bring you meat and drink and clothes for bedding. And if you can slay me in this wood and win my lady, you may have her, for me; she is yours.’

‘It is agreed,’ Palamon answered, and each having pledged his faith they parted till the morrow.

It is well said that love is like a king who will suffer no rivalry nor fellowship. So found Palamon and Arcite.

On the morrow before daybreak Arcite rose, and taking with him two good suits of armour, he rode forth alone to the wood. There, at the place and time agreed upon, the two knights met. Their colour changed at their meeting; like the Thracian hunter who waits with his spear at the gap, and hearing the hunted lion or bear come crashing through the thicket, thinks, 'Here comes my mortal foe: here at the gap I must slay him or else by him be slain,' so these two bore themselves towards each other. No salutation passed between them, but in silence, with brotherly courtesy, each helped to arm the other. Then they came together fiercely, thrusting at one another with their sharp strong spears. Palamon fought like a raging lion, and Arcite like a cruel tiger; they struck at each other like wild boars foaming mad with rage. So for a long time they strove, up to their ankles in blood.

But destiny, which governs all things, and overrules the passions of men, hatred and love alike, ordained an interruption to their fight. Theseus, who loved the chase so well that the dawn of every day found him ready to rise and go a-hunting, had ridden forth that

morning with hounds and horn. With him there rode the fair Hippolyta and Emily, clad all in green. The sun shone clear, and Theseus rode with a glad heart, making his way towards the wood near by, where he had been told there was a hart. Intent upon the chase he rode straight to the open glade, where the hart was wont to pass. When he had reached the glade he looked against the sun and beheld Palamon and Arcite, fighting like wild boars, their bright swords flashing to and fro so furiously that every stroke seemed powerful enough to fell an oak. Who they were Theseus did not know, but striking spurs to his horse he was between them in a moment, his sword drawn.

‘Hold!’ he cried, ‘no more, on pain of death! By Mars, he shall die who strikes another blow! Tell me what manner of men ye be, who venture to fight here without judge or arbiter, as though ye fought in the lists.’

Swiftly Palamon made answer.

‘Sir, what need of words? We have deserved death, both of us. We are two unhappy wretches, weary of our lives. As you are a just judge grant us no mercy; slay me first, and afterwards my comrade: or else slay him first; for, though you little know it, this is Arcite, your mortal foe, whom you banished on pain of death; this is he who calling himself

Philostrate has deceived you these many years, and has been made your chief squire; and this is he who loves the lady Emily. And, since the day has come for me to die, I will make full confession; I am that unhappy Palamon, who has broken from your prison. I am your mortal foe; and so hot a lover of the lady Emily, that I would die here in her sight. Therefore I ask for death; but slay my comrade also, for we have both deserved to die.'

'Your own lips have condemned you,' Theseus answered, 'and you shall die without delay.'

At this the queen began to weep for womanly pity, and so did Emily and all the ladies of their train. For it seemed to them a grievous thing that such a chance should happen; for these were gentle knights, of great estate, and their quarrel was for love alone. And when they saw their bleeding wounds, they wept the more, and fell upon their knees before Theseus intreating his mercy, until at last his mood began to soften (for pity is never far from a gentle heart), and, angry as he was at first, yet when he considered their crime and its cause, he could not but hold them excused. For every man, he thought, will if he can both help himself in

love and escape from prison. He was moved to pity, too, by the women's tears. 'Shame upon a prince without mercy,' he said to himself, 'who is pitiless to all offenders alike! Truly there were little wisdom in treating those who are humble and repentant with the same severity as though they were hardened sinners.'

Then, his anger being past, he looked up with smiling eyes.

'How great a lord is the god of love!' he said. 'Nothing avails against his power. Well may he be called a god for his miracles, for he does what he will with every heart. Behold these two, Arcite and Palamon, who being free from my prison might have lived at Thebes like princes; they know that I am their mortal enemy, and have power to slay them, yet love has brought them here to die. See now what folly is theirs! See how they bleed! Such are the wages of their lord, the god of love; and yet, in spite of all, they think their service wise! But the strangest part of the matter is, that she for whose sake they follow these delights is no more grateful to them than I myself; she knows no more about these fierce doings than if she were a hare or a cuckoo! But, young or old, a man must needs play the fool at one time or another, as I myself know well.

Therefore, as one who has himself been caught in love's snare, and knows its torments, I here forgive you your offence, at the request of the queen who kneels for you, and of my dear sister Emily; and in return you shall swear to me never more to make war against me, but to be my friends so far as you are able.'

• They willingly swore as he desired, praying his favour, that they might serve him, which he granted them.

'As regards my sister Emily,' he said, 'for whom you strive, either of you is worthy both in wealth and lineage to wed her, even though she were a queen. But you know yourselves that she cannot wed you both, though you should fight for ever. This then is my plan. You shall both go freely where you will; and on this day fifty weeks hence you shall return, each bringing with you a hundred knights fully armed for the lists, ready to do battle for her. And I promise you upon my faith as a knight that whichever of you shall with his hundred slay his adversary or drive him from the lists, to him will I give Emily to wife. The lists I will make here in this place, and I myself will be your judge. If this plan pleases you, say so, and be content.'

Who now so happy as Palamon and Arcite?
Great was the joy of the whole company, and

all thanked Theseus upon their knees for the boon he had granted them, most of all the two Thebans. Then with high hopes and merry hearts the knights took leave, and rode homeward to old Thebes with its wide walls.

The Third Part

Never in the whole world have there been lists more splendid than those prepared by Theseus. The theatre was circular in shape, and measured a mile in compass, with stone walls, moated without; within, to a height of sixty feet, rose tiers of steps from which each spectator might behold the combat without hindering his neighbour. There was no cunning craftsman in the land but was employed by Theseus in the building and decoration of this theatre. Eastward and westward stood two gates of white marble; over the eastern gate he raised an altar and oratory in honour of Venus, goddess of love, and over the western one another in honour of Mars; and northward, in a turret on the wall, he built a rich oratory of white alabaster and red coral dedicated to Diana.

All these three oratories were richly carved and painted. On the walls of the temple of Venus were depicted figures of the various attendants of love; tears, broken sleep, beauty

and youth, hope and desire, music and dancing, and many more. The garden of Venus was painted there, and the histories of a thousand votaries of love, famous in days of old; here too was the figure of the goddess, glorious to behold, rising naked from the green waves, garlanded with roses, her doves fluttering overhead; before her stood her son Cupid, winged and blind, bearing his bow and arrows.

On the walls of the temple of Mars was depicted, amid a gloomy and desolate forest, the famous temple of the god of war in Thrace, built all of burnished steel, with gates of adamant. There too were painted violence, red wrath, pale fear, and murder; war with gaping wounds, the reek of burning byres, men slain, ships burnt, cities destroyed, and many another mischance brought about by Mars. Upon a chariot stood the statue of the god, armed and terrible, a wolf at his feet devouring a man.

In like manner the walls of the temple of Diana were painted with scenes of the chase; there was Acteon, changed by Diana into a hart, because he had seen her bathing, and devoured by his own hounds; there was Atalanta hunting the wild boar, and many another votary of the chase. The goddess herself, clad in green, with a bow and quiver,

sat upon a hart, with hounds about her, and the moon under her feet. Well and cunningly had the painter wrought, and many a florin had the colours cost him.

So the lists were set, and when the appointed day drew near, Palamon and Arcite returned to Athens, each bringing with him a hundred knights armed at all points for the combat. Never since the world began have so many noble knights been numbered in so small a company. For everyone who loved chivalry and desired renown had begged permission to join the combat, and happy was he who was chosen. For if the like befell tomorrow, well you know that every brave knight and lover, be it in England or any other land, would desire to be there. A combat for a lady, benedicite! A goodly sight it were to see.

So with Palamon there rode many a good knight; some were armed in coat of mail, breast-plate, and tunic, some in plate armour; some carried shields, some battle-axes, and some steel maces, each according to his choice. With Palamon came Lycurgus, the great king of Thrace, black-bearded, large of limb, and fierce of aspect, with eyes which glowed like fire beneath his shaggy brows. Over his shining armour he wore instead of a surcoat a coal-black bear-skin, and on his raven locks was

set a jewelled circlet of massive gold. After the custom of his country he stood high upon a golden chariot drawn by four white bulls; and beside the chariot ran twenty great white mastiffs for the hunting of the lion or the deer, fast muzzled and collared with golden collars. A hundred valiant knights followed in his train.

With Arcite the great Emetrius, king of India, came riding like the god of war himself, upon a bay steed trapped in steel, covered with cloth of gold. His surcoat was of silk, broïdered with great pearls, his saddle of burnished gold, and from his shoulders hung a short cloak sparkling with red rubies. He was about five and twenty years of age; his crisp hair curled in yellow ringlets, shining like the sun; his colour was fresh, his face sprinkled with freckles; his glance was fierce as a lion's, his voice like a trumpet blast. His head was crowned with a green laurel wreath, and for his pleasure he carried on his hand a tame eagle, white as a lily. Tame lions and leopards gambolled about him, and a hundred knights rode with him; for earls, princes, and kings were gathered in this noble company, for the sake of chivalry and love.

So they all came and alighted in the city on Sunday morning early, and there Theseus

lodged them, each according to his rank, and feasted and entertained them with great splendour. The feasting, the minstrelsy, the many gifts to high and low, and the magnificence of the palace, I will not here describe; nor will I tell you the order of those who sat upon the dais, which ladies were the fairest, who could dance and sing the best, or speak most feelingly.



A Feast

of love, what hawks sat upon the perches above, and what hounds couched upon the floor below; all these things I will pass over, and proceed with my tale.

On Sunday night, some two hours before daybreak, the lark began to sing, and Palamon hearing it arose, singing also, and with a heart full of courage and devotion went forth to the temple of Venus in the lists. There he knelt

down, and with anxious humility offered up his prayer to the goddess.

‘O lady Venus, fairest of the fair, pity my tears and accept my humble petition. Alas, I have no words to tell of my heart’s torment; but thou, O lady bright, knowest all my desire. I ask not for renown, nor for victory on the morrow; my desire is only to win my lady Emily, and to die in thy service. Bring it about in whatever way thou wilt, I care not whose is the victory, if I may but hold my lady in my arms. Grant my prayer, and I will worship for evermore in thy temple, and offer daily sacrifices upon thine altar. But if thou wilt not grant it, then I pray that Arcite’s lance may pierce my heart to-morrow; for being dead I shall not grieve at his winning her to wife. Hear me, dear lady, and help me to my love.’

When his prayer was ended he offered sacrifice, and then at last the statue of Venus shook and made a sign by which he understood that his prayer was granted; so he returned home with a light heart.

When the sun rose, up rose Emily also, and went forth to the temple of Diana. The maidens who attended her bore with them the fire, the incense, the garments, the horns of mead, and all things needed for the sacrifice.

Emily, while they censed the temple, washed herself with well-water; then, her bright hair unbound and her head crowned with a garland of green oak-leaves, she kindled two fires upon the altar, and having performed the due rites, made her prayer to Diana.

‘O goddess of maidens and of the green woods,’ she said, ‘that hast known my heart for many a year, thou knowest that I desire to be a maiden all my days, and not a wife. For I am one of thy company, and love hunting and to walk in the wild woods. Now help me, lady, and send peace between this Palamôn and Arcite who so love me, and turn away their hearts from me, that their love may die, or else be given to another. Goddess of maidenhood, behold my tears, and keep me ever a maiden; so will I ever serve thee. But, if this prayer may not be granted, and if I must needs wed one of these two, then send me him who loves me best.’

While she prayed, the fires upon the altar burned clear, but suddenly she saw a strange sight; for all at once one of the fires died down and sprang up again, and immediately the other one went out with a whistling noise like the burning of wet wood, and from the ends of the brands ran out drops like blood. Emily cried out with terror at the sight, and

upon that Diana herself appeared, clad like a huntress, bow in hand.

‘Daughter,’ she said, ‘be comforted. It is decreed by the gods that thou shalt be wedded to one of the two who have suffered so much for thee; to which of them I may not tell thee; but the fires upon my altar declare to thee thy fortune in love.’

Then the arrows in her quiver rang together and she vanished; after which Emily, perplexed and wondering, commended herself to the protection of the goddess and returned home.

After this came Arcite, to offer sacrifice and make his prayer in the temple of Mars.

‘O strong god of battles,’ he prayed, ‘who givest victory to whom thou wilt, accept my sacrifice, and take pity upon my pain. Never was any living creature so tormented by love as I; for she for whom I suffer all this grief cares not whether I sink or swim. Well I know that before she grants me her favour I must win her by force of arms; I know too that without thy help my strength will avail me nothing. Help me, then, in the battle to-morrow, and grant me the victory. Mine shall be the labour, thine the glory; for I will serve thee for ever, and honour thy temple above all other places; there I will hang up my banner, and all the arms of my company, and will burn

eternal fire upon thine altar. I will offer thee, too, my flowing hair and beard, never yet touched by shears or razor. Only have pity upon me and grant me victory.'

As he ended his prayer, the temple doors clashed loudly, the fires burned brightly upon the altar, and a sweet smell arose. Arcite wondering cast fresh incense upon the flames, with further rites, until at last the armour rang upon the statue of Mars, and a low voice murmured 'Victory,' upon which, giving glory to Mars, he returned to his lodging, full of joy and hope, and as happy as a bird in the bright sunshine.

But upon this there arose great strife in the heavens between Venus, goddess of love, and Mars, stern god of war, till wise old Saturn bade them end their quarrel.

'Dear daughter Venus, weep no more,' he said, 'my power is great, and I will find a way whereby thine own knight, Palamon, shall have his lady, as thou hast promised him.'

The Fourth Part

Great was the feasting at Athens that day. The merry season of the May made everyone so happy that they spent the Monday in jousting and dancing; but since they were to rise early on the morrow to see the great fight, they went

early to rest that night. At daybreak on the morrow every inn rang with the clatter of horses and of arms, and many a troop of noble lords went riding to the palace. There might be seen rich and strange armour, wrought with steel and gold; bright shields and trappings, helmets of beaten gold, and coats of mail; lords on their coursers, richly clad, knights of retinue, squires nailing spears, buckling helms, fastening on straps to shields. Foaming steeds champed upon their golden bridles, armourers hurried to and fro with file and hammer. There were yeomen on foot, and a throng of commoners with short staves; pipes, drums, and trumpets sounded warlike music. The palace was full of people standing in groups discussing the two Theban knights; some said it would be this way, others that; some favouring him with the black beard, some the one with the thick hair, some saying that this man looked grim and a good fighter, some that this other had a battle-axe full twenty pounds in weight. Thus till long after sunrise the hall was full of conjectures and debate.

The great Duke Theseus, woken from sleep by the noise and the music, remained in his chamber until the two Theban knights were brought with equal honours to the palace. The Duke sat at a window, magnificently arrayed,

and the people pressed round to see him and to hear his will. A herald commanded silence, and when all was still he thus proclaimed the pleasure of Theseus.

‘The Duke has in his wisdom considered that to fight this tourney as in mortal combat would lead to much loss of gentle blood; therefore he will alter his first purpose, and decrees that no man, upon pain of death, shall bring into the lists any manner of pole-axe, dagger, or short sword with a sharp point to stab with; nor shall any man ride more than one course against his fellow with a sharpened spear; but on foot he may thrust if he will, to defend himself. And he that is worsted shall not be slain, but taken prisoner and brought to the stake which shall be set up on either side, and there remain. And if it happen that the chieftain on either side be taken or slain, the tourney shall be brought to an end. God speed you; lay on heartily; fight your fill with long-sword and with mace. This is the Duke’s will.’

The heavens resounded with the shouting of the people. ‘God save so good a prince!’ they cried, ‘he will have no shedding of blood!’ Up went the trumpets and the music, and the whole company rode forward to the lists through the streets of the city, all hung with cloth of

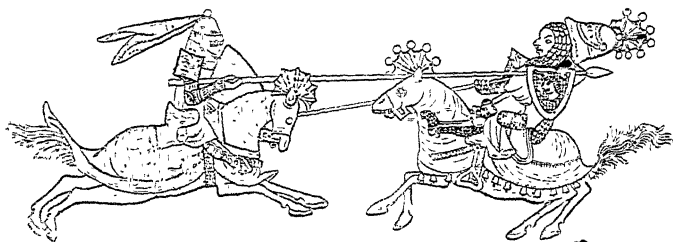
gold. Theseus rode first, the two Thebans on either side of him; then came the queen and Emily, and after them the rest of the company, riding in order of rank. They reached the lists a little before prime, and Theseus throned himself on high, with the queen, Emily, and the other ladies about him, while the populace crowded to the seats. Then from the west, through the gate of Mars, Arcite bearing a red banner entered with his hundred, while at the same moment Palamon under a white banner entered with a cheerful and gallant bearing through the gate of Venus on the east. Never were two companies so evenly matched, whether in valour, estate, or age. When they had been drawn up in two ranks and their names called over, that there might be no deception about their numbers, the gates were shut and a herald cried aloud, 'Do now your devoir, proud young knights!'

The heralds cease riding to and fro, out ring the trumpets, spears are laid in rest and spurs struck deep. Now is it seen who can best joust and ride; shafts are shivered upon stout bucklers; up spring the spears, full twenty feet on high, out flash the swords silver bright, hewing the helmets to pieces; bones are broken by the heavy maces, and the red blood flows; horses stumble and go down, hurling their

riders to the ground ; one man defends himself on foot with his truncheon, another is rolled like a ball under the feet of the combatants, another is thrust through the body and led captive to the stake, where he must perforce remain.

Sometimes Theseus calls a halt for rest and for refreshment, and then the combat is renewed.

Many times during the conflict have the



A Joust

two Thebans encountered, and twice has each unhorsed the other. No tigress robbed of her whelps is so fierce against the hunter as Arcite in his rage against Palamon ; nor is any lion so desirous of his prey as Palamon to slay Arcite. The fierce strokes bite into their helmets, the blood flows from their sides.

But of every thing there comes an end at last, and before sunset king Emetrius caught Palamon unawares as he fought with Arcite

and made his sword bite deep into his flesh; and by the force of twenty men Palamon without yielding was taken prisoner and dragged to the stake. In the attempt to rescue him the mighty king Lycurgus was overthrown, and Emetrius himself, for all his strength, was borne a sword's length from his saddle by a blow dealt him by Palamon before he could be taken. Yet all in vain; his brave heart could avail him nothing; he was brought to the stake, and there he must remain.

When Theseus saw it he cried out: 'Hold! No more! The conflict is ended. Arcite of Thebes shall have Emily to wife, for he has won her in fair fight.'

At this there arose from the people a shout of joy so loud it seemed as though the lists would fall. In the heavens Venus wept for the defeat of her suppliant; but Saturn bade her be comforted, for the end was not yet. 'The knight of Mars has received the boon he asked,' said he; 'wait, and thou shalt soon be satisfied.'

The trumpets sounded and the heralds shouted aloud for joy at Arcite's victory; and Arcite, having doffed his helmet to show his face spurred his courser the length of the great lists, looking upwards towards Emily, while she in turn bent friendly eyes upon him, being ready, as are most women, to follow the favour

of fortune. But all at once a wonder came to pass. Out of the ground there sprang a sudden fire, sent by Pluto at request of Saturn, from which Arcite's horse sprang aside in terror, pitching his rider from the saddle on to his head. There he lay like one dead, his breast crushed in by the saddle-bow, his face darkened by the rush of blood. At once he was carried from the lists to the palace, where he was cut out of his armour and softly laid upon a bed, for he was still alive and conscious, and called continually upon Emily.

Meanwhile Theseus with all the company had returned to Athens with great pomp and pageantry, for he would not discomfort them all because of this misfortune; men said besides that Arcite would not die. They rejoiced too that none of them were slain, though many were sorely wounded. For wounds and broken bones some had salves and some charms, and in order to be healed they drank brews of herbs and sage. Theseus feasted them with honour all night long, as was fitting; nor was there felt to be any disgrace in defeat, for to fall is only a mischance, and none may hold it cowardice in one knight to be overcome by twenty, and without yielding to be dragged by force to the stake. Theseus then, to prevent all rivalry and rancour, proclaimed

the valour of both sides to be equal, gave them gifts according to their rank, and feasted them for three days. Then he escorted the kings a long way out of the city, and everyone said farewell and went his way home.

Meanwhile Arcite's injury increased; the wound in his breast mortified, and no remedy could help him. When he felt that he must die, he sent for Emily and for his cousin Palamon, and spoke to them thus:

'To you, my lady, whom I love best of all the world, I can tell nothing of the sorrows of my heart; but, since I must die, I bequeath to you my spirit's service. Alas for the pain I have so long endured for your sake! Alas for death and for our parting! Alas, my Emily, queen of my heart, my lady and my wife! What has this world to give to man? A moment with his love, and then the loneliness of his cold grave. Farewell, my Emily. I pray you take me gently in your arms, and hearken to what I say.

'For many a long day my cousin Palamon and I have striven for your love. Now truly, as I desire that Jupiter may guide my soul, I know of no man in this world who is so worthy to be loved, for his truth, honour, knighthood, wisdom, humility, and noble birth, as Palamon, who is your servant, and will be all

his life. 'Therefore, if ever you are to be a wife, forget not Palamon.'

With that his speech failed, and the chill of death crept over him. His consciousness faded, his eyes grew dim, his breath began to fail him; but still his eyes dwelt on his lady's face, and his last word was 'Emily!' And then his spirit went forth from his body; and whither it went I cannot tell you, for to that bourne I have never travelled. Enough that Arcite died.

Emily shrieked aloud, Palamon wept; and Theseus bore his fainting sister from the corpse. What avails it to tell how night and day she wept, sorrowing for Arcite as a woman does for the death of her husband? All the city, young and old, mourned likewise; there was more lamentation than when Hector was brought slain to Troy. No one could comfort Theseus save his old father Ægeus, who knew the changes and chances of this life, how after sorrow follows joy, and after joy comes sorrow.

'Death must needs come soon or late to every man upon this earth,' he said. 'This world is but a highway of sorrows, and we are pilgrims journeying along it; death is our goal, the end of every earthly ill.' And many other things he said to the same effect, that the people might take comfort.

Theseus, after much thought, commanded that Arcite's funeral pyre should be built in that same sweet green wood where Palamon and Arcite first did battle for their love. So he gave order that the old oaks of the wood should be felled and laid together in logs for burning. Then he caused a bier to be spread with the richest cloth of gold, and clad Arcite in the same, and laid him with uncovered face upon the bier, a crown of green laurel upon his head, and in his hand a bright sharp sword. Then, that all the people might look upon him, he brought him to the hall, which rang with the sounds of lamentation.

Then came the mournful Palamon, with unkempt beard, his hair sprinkled with ashes, his black clothes bedropped with tears; and weeping more than all the rest, Emily, the saddest of the train. In order that the ceremony should be rich and noble, Theseus commanded three great white steeds to be led forth, with trappings of glittering steel, blazoned with the arms of Arcite. Upon these steeds sat riders, one bearing his shield, another his spear, and another his Turkish bow with case of burnished gold. With sorrowful faces they rode at a foot's pace towards the grove. With slow steps, their eyes red with weeping, the noblest of the Greeks

carried the bier upon their shoulders along the chief street of the city, which was all hung with black. On the right hand came old Ægeus, on the left prince Theseus, bearing in their hands golden vessels full of honey and milk, blood and wine. Then came Palamon with a great company, and after that Emily, carrying fire for the funeral service, as was the custom of that time.

Of the pomp and ceremony of the funeral rites I need not tell you; nor of the building of the pyre, broad and high, and of all the trees of which it was built up, oak, fir, birch, willow, and many another; nor how the birds and beasts and the woodland gods and nymphs fled affrighted from the wood when the trees were felled; nor need I describe the richness of the pyre, the cloth of gold and spices, the myrrh and the incense, the gems and flowery garlands, among which the body of Arcite lay; nor how Emily set fire to the funeral pile, nor how she swooned; nor what jewels were cast into the fire when it burned fiercely; nor how some cast in shields and spears and cups of wine and milk and blood; nor how the Greeks, shouting and clashing their spears, rode three times round the fire; nor how the ladies wailed, and Emily was led homeward; nor how the funeral games were held all night. All

these things I will pass over, and make an end of my long tale.

After some years had passed by, and the mourning for Arcite had ceased, a council was held at Athens, at which, among other points, the question of winning complete submission from the Thebans was discussed. The noble Theseus thereupon sent for Palamon, who, though he did not know the reason, came at his command, still sorrowful and clad in black. Then Theseus sent also for Emily, and when they were seated, and all were silent, waited a while with a grave face, sighing before he spoke.

‘High Heaven has decreed,’ he said at last, ‘that all things in this world come to an end early or late; nothing can endure for ever; death comes to all men alike, none may escape it. So it is wiser, as it seems to me, to make a virtue of necessity, and to accept willingly that which we cannot refuse. And surely the man has most honour who dies in the flower of his youth and the height of his renown, untouched by shame. And his friend ought to rejoice that he should die with honour in the prime of manhood rather than when his fame is dimmed by age and his prowess all forgotten. Truly it is best for a man’s renown that he should die when his fame is at its

height. Why then are we sad that noble Arcite, the flower of chivalry, is departed with honour from the prison-house of this life? Why do his cousin and his wife mourn for his welfare who loved them so much? Can it please him? Nay, never a whit, God knows; they hurt both his soul and themselves.

‘My counsel is, then, that after sorrow we rejoice, thanking Jupiter for all his grace. And where there is most sorrow, there let us first begin to amend it, making a double sorrow into one perfect and lasting joy. Sister,’ he said, turning to Emily, ‘my decree is, with the assent of my Council here assembled, that you have pity upon your own knight, the noble Palamon, who since first he saw you, has served you with all his heart, and that you take him for your lord and husband. He is son to a King’s brother; but though he were only a poor squire, since he has served you so many years and suffered so much for your sake, his deserts should be considered. Give me your hand.’

Then he turned to Palamon.

‘Methinks there is little need of preaching,’ he said, ‘to win your consent to this. Draw near, and take your lady by the hand.’

Thus without delay the marriage was made between these two, and with all joy and melody Palamon was wedded to Emily. Now all was

well with him; he lived in health and wealth and happiness, Emily loving him so tenderly, and he serving her so courteously, that no word of jealousy or anger ever passed between them. So these two passed their lives to the end; and God save this fair company!

All the company praised the tale told by the Knight, and especially those of gentle birth. The Host was delighted with the success of his plan and turned to the Monk, asking him to tell something in his turn. But the Miller, who had already drunk so much ale that he could hardly sit upon his horse, put in his claim loudly and rudely, and swore that he would speak next and would tell a tale which would match the story which they had heard from the Knight. The Host seeing how far from sober he was, tried to quiet him, and asked him to wait awhile; but he insisted, and declared that he would either tell his tale or leave the company, upon which the Host bade him tell on, calling him at the same time a fool, who did not know what he was doing. 'I know that I am drunk,' said the Miller, 'but if I speak amiss, it is the fault of the Southwark ale, and not mine. I will tell you a story of a carpenter, and how he was tricked by a clerk.' The Reeve, who was himself a carpenter, began to rebuke

him, and told him to hold his tongue; but the drunken Miller would listen to no reason, and insisted on telling his tale. After that the Reeve, who was still rather angry, proceeded to tell in revenge a story of a cheating miller.

The Cook then offered to tell a tale, and the Host allowed it, but warned him that it must be of better quality than the pasties and other victuals which he sold in his shop, where there were far too many flies about. 'But don't be angry,' he added, 'for many a true thing may be said in jest.' 'Yes,' said the Cook, 'but a true jest is a bad jest, ~~as the~~ Flemings say; so you must not be angry, my friend Harry Bailly, if before we part I tell a tale about an innkeeper. However, that shall be afterwards.' He began then to tell a story of an idle and dissolute apprentice in London; and so the tale-telling went on, as the pilgrims slowly rode through Deptford and Greenwich, and on towards Dartford.

THE SECOND DAY

It was about ten o'clock in the morning when our Host, seeing by the sun and the length of the shadows that the day was advancing, urged the company to lose no more time, and called upon the Man of Law to tell his tale.

‘Mine Host, I am ready,’ said he, ‘to fulfil my promise, for a promise is a debt, and the law which a man gives to another he ought himself to keep. But all the stories I can think of have been already told by Chaucer, in one book or another, in the best English he can write, though truly his skill in rhyme and metre is but small. Nevertheless, though I am no poet, I will do my best.’

THE MAN OF LAW'S TALE OF CONSTANCE

Once upon a time there lived in Syria a company of wealthy merchants, who sent out their wares, spices, rich satins and cloth of gold, far and wide over the world; so cheap

and so excellent was their merchandise that all men were eager to trade with them.

Now it chanced that either for pleasure or for business some of these merchants travelled to Rome; and while they were there, the high renown of the Emperor's daughter, the lady Constance, came to their ears. Every day they heard fresh tales of her beauty and virtue. 'Never in all the world,' the people said, 'was anybody like our Emperor's daughter. She is as good as she is beautiful, wise, for all her youth, humble, gentle, holy in heart, and generous in almsgiving.' When the ~~merchants~~ had freighted their ships anew, and had beheld this fair maiden, they returned well content to Syria.

Now it happened that they were in high favour with the Sultan of Syria, who, when they returned from any strange country, would entertain them with courtesy, that he might hear the tidings they brought from foreign lands, and the wonderful things they had seen. On this occasion they told him, among other things, about the lady Constance, praising her so highly that the Sultan was filled with a great desire to have her for his wife. Calling his counsellors together he told them of his wish, saying that without Constance he could not live, and bidding them devise some plan by which

he might be wedded to her. For a long time they discussed the matter. It would be very difficult, they all said, to bring about such a marriage, for no Christian king would allow his daughter to be married to a Saracen.

‘Rather than lose Constance,’ the Sultan answered, ‘I will be baptized and become a Christian; her and none other will I marry.’

In this way the matter was decided. By means of treaties and embassies, and through the mediation of the Church and the Pope it was at last agreed that the Sultan and all his ~~subjects~~ should be baptized, and that he should have Constance to wife. A great escort of bishops, lords, ladies and knights was appointed to accompany Constance to her new home, and the Emperor commanded that prayer should be made throughout the city for blessings on her marriage and on her voyage.

The day of her departure came, and Constance, pale with grief, made ready for her journey. No wonder that she wept, being parted from all her friends, and sent to a strange country to be subject to a husband whom she had never seen. Though, needless to say, all husbands are good and kind, as wives know well.

‘Father,’ she said, ‘and you, dear mother, I entreat your blessing before I depart. For

since it is your will that I should go into Syria, I go, and shall never see you more. God give me grace to fulfil all his commands; what matter though I die, wretched woman that I am, born, like all women, to grief and thralldom !'

Never in all this world was heard such piteous weeping as was heard in this chamber at her leave-taking. But there was no help for it; go she must.

With great pomp and solemnity the beautiful, sad maiden was led down to the ship, and after sorrowful farewells she sailed away ~~trying~~ to smile at the last.

Now the Sultan's mother, who was a very fount of iniquity, hearing that her son meant to give up his old religion, at once sent for her counsellors, and when they were assembled she thus addressed them, sitting in their midst.

'My lords,' she said, 'you all know that my son is on the point of forsaking the holy laws of our Koran, given to us by Mahomet, the prophet of God. But as regards myself, I here vow rather to die than to forget that law. What will the new faith bring us but bondage and penance in this life, and hell hereafter, because we have renounced Mahomet? But, my lords, only swear to follow my advice, and we are safe for ever.'

They all swore to support her in every way they could, and she then went on to disclose her plan.

‘Let us,’ she said, ‘pretend to become Christians, and be baptized—a little cold water will not hurt us. Then I will prepare such a feast for the Sultan as will well requite him; let his wife be christened never so white, and bring with her a whole font full of water, she will need it all to wash away the red.’

The wicked Sultanness, having dismissed her Council, went to the Sultan, and told him that she would renounce her faith and receive baptism at the hands of a priest, repenting that she had been so long a heathen. She begged him too to allow her to invite all the Christians to a great banquet.

‘I will entertain them,’ she said, ‘as well as I am able.’

The Sultan thanked her on his knees for her request, so overjoyed that he knew not what to say; and she kissed her son and went home.

The Second Part

Constance with all her train arrived at length in Syria, and the Sultan sent messages through all his kingdom announcing the arrival of his bride, and begging his mother to ride

and meet the queen, that the honour of his kingdom might be upheld.

Great was the throng and rich was the array of the Syrians and Romans met together there. The Sultanness, magnificently dressed, received Constance as fondly as a mother would a beloved daughter, and then with great pomp they rode to the city, where the Sultan welcomed them in royal array; and here for a time they all feasted and made merry. The day came for the banquet to which the old Sultanness had invited the Christians, and all, both young and old, thronged to ~~the~~ feast, to see the Sultan and his bride, and to enjoy the dainties set before them. But they bought their enjoyment all too dear. Before they rose from the table the Sultan and all the Christians present were stabbed to death as ~~they~~ sat, by order of the wicked Sultanness. Constance alone escaped; not another Christian was left alive in all Syria. Constance herself they put into a ship without a rudder, setting her adrift and bidding her find her own way back to Italy. In the ship they put the treasure which she had brought with her and abundance of food and clothing; and thus she sailed forth over the salt sea. Kneeling down she prayed piteously. 'May the Cross of Christ save my soul,' she prayed, 'on the day when I am drowned in the deep sea.'

For days and years she drifted, tossed by the waves, and only waiting for death. In truth she was preserved both from the knife of the murderer and the perils of the deep by as great a miracle as that by which Daniel was saved in the lions' den, and Jonah in the whale's belly. Far indeed was the ship driven, through the Grecian seas and past the Straits of Morocco, into our own wild Northern ocean, until at last it was cast ashore upon the coast of Northumberland, under a certain castle, where it stuck fast in the sand, and there remained.

The Constable of the castle came down to look at the wreck, and in searching the vessel found Constance within it, weary and despairing, her treasure beside her. She besought him to slay her, that she might be freed from her misery; but the Constable, understanding her tongue, which was a debased sort of Latin, brought her to dry land, where she knelt down on the sand of the shore and thanked God for her safety. But she would answer no questions about herself, nor tell any one who she was; she was so dazed, she said, by her wanderings on the sea that she had lost her memory. The Constable and his wife, Dame Hermengild, took pity upon her, and gave her shelter under their roof; and she was so diligent and anxious to

serve and please every one about her, that all who saw her loved her.

The Constable and his wife and all the people of the country round were pagans; but Hermengild loved Constance so dearly, and Constance prayed so long and earnestly and with so many tears, that in time she converted the Constable's wife to be a Christian. No Christians dared to live in that country, by reason of the pagans who had conquered all the North, driving the Christian Britons to seek refuge in Wales. Only a few who were secretly Christians remained, and ~~of~~ these three dwelt near the castle. One of them was a blind man, who could see only with that sight of the mind which the blind possess.

Now it chanced that one bright summer's day the Constable with his wife and Constance were walking by the sea shore, when they met this blind man, who was bent crooked with age.

'In the name of Christ,' he cried, 'give me my sight again, Dame Hermengild.'

Hermengild was terrified at the words, fearing lest her husband, discovering that she was a Christian, should slay her. But Constance bade her take courage, telling her to do God's will as a true daughter of the Church. The Constable, surprised by what he heard,

asked the meaning of it, and Constance at once told him the truth, and explained the Christian faith to him; so that before evening the Constable too was converted and became a Christian.

But Satan, who is ever watching to assail all virtue, hated Constance for her goodness and plotted her ruin. He moved a young knight who lived in the neighbourhood to fall desperately in love with her, and she, knowing that he was a bad man, rejected his wooing; whereupon his love turned into hatred, and in order to be revenged upon her, he planned to bring her to a shameful death. Watching his opportunity while the Constable was away, he stole secretly one night into Hermengild's chamber, where she and Constance were both asleep, weary with prayer and watching. Softly he crept up to the bed, and cut Hermengild's throat as she lay asleep; then, laying the blood-stained knife by the side of Constance, he went his way.

Shortly afterwards the Constable returned, bringing with him Alla, who was King of Northumberland, and a wise and valiant man. Bitter was the Constable's grief at finding his wife cruelly murdered, and the blood-stained knife lying beside Constance, who, distracted by grief, knew not what to say. The whole story was

told to King Alla, and how Constance was first found in the ship, and at the tale his heart was moved to pity ; for she stood before him in her innocence like a lamb brought to the slaughter, accused of the dreadful crime by the murderer himself. No one else would believe that she was guilty, for all could bear witness to her goodness and her love for Hermengild.

A court was held in order that the King might inquire further into the case. Poor Constance, brought before him, fell upon her knees and protested her innocence before Heaven, praying to God and to the blessed Virgin to help her in her need. Have you not sometimes seen, in the midst of a crowd, the pale face of a condemned man led towards the gallows, easily to be distinguished by its pallor from all around him ? So Constance looked as she gazed about her, standing alone without a friend or champion in her need.

King Alla was filled with such compassion that the tears ran down his face.

‘Let a book be brought,’ he commanded, ‘and if this knight will swear upon it that she is guilty, we will consider whom to appoint as her judge.’

A British copy of the Gospels was brought, and on the book the knight swore that she was guilty. But even as he spoke, a hand

smote him on the neck, so that in the sight of all he dropped down like a stone, his eyes starting out of his head; and a voice was heard saying, .‘Thou hast slandered the innocent daughter of Holy Church!’

Every one save Constance was aghast at the miracle, fearing the judgement of God. Great was their penitence for their false suspicions; and the result of it all was that the King and many others were converted and became Christians. The false knight was at once put to death, and Alla afterwards, amid great rejoicings, was wedded to Constance, making her his queen.

But Alla's mother Donegild, who was a cruel and proud woman, was much displeased at the marriage, thinking it a shame to her son that he should take a nameless stranger to be his wife.

Some time after the wedding King Alla was called away to the North to fight against his enemies the Scots, leaving Constance in the care of his Constable. In his absence a baby boy was born to her, who was christened Maurice, and the Constable despatched a letter to the King telling him the good news.

But the messenger who carried the letter, thinking to earn a reward, rode first with his news to the King's mother.

‘Madam, you have cause for rejoicing,’ he said, ‘for our lady the queen has a son. I have here a sealed letter telling the news, which I must bear with all haste to the King. If you have any message to send to him, I am your servant; command me.’

‘I will give you one to-morrow,’ Donegild answered, ‘to-night you shall rest here.’

The messenger drank deep that night of the queen’s wine, and while he lay in a drunken sleep, Donegild robbed him of his letter, replacing it by another, which purported to be from the Constable, sealed and directed like the first. This forged letter said that the queen’s child was so horrible and deformed a creature that no one dared to stay in the castle with it, and that the mother was clearly a witch, who had cast her spells upon them all, and was now feared and shunned by everyone.

The King was filled with grief when he read the letter, but he told no one of his trouble, and with his own hand he wrote to the Constable in reply, saying, ‘God’s will be done. Keep both mother and child, be it foul or fair, in safety until my return. God in his own good time may send me another heir.’

This letter he sealed, with many secret

tears, and the messenger at once set out on his return journey.

But on his way he again stopped at Donegild's castle, again she detained him and made him drunk, and again while he slept his letter was stolen and replaced by another, couched in these words:

'The King commands his Constable, on pain of death by hanging, not to suffer Constance to remain in his kingdom for more than three days after receiving this order, but to put her, with her child and all that belongs to her, into the same ship in which he found her, and to push her off from the shore, forbidding her ever to return.'

On the morrow the messenger went on his way to the castle, and delivered this letter to the Constable, who when he had read it was overwhelmed with horror.

'Alas!' he cried, 'how is it that the innocent are punished, while the wicked live in such prosperity? Alas, poor Constance, woe is me that I must either be your executioner or myself die a felon's death!'

All the people of the neighbourhood, young and old alike, wept, and lamented when they heard of the cruel fate to which the King had condemned poor Constance. But the time appointed came, and on the fourth day Constance,

with a deadly pale face, walked down to her ship. Then, kneeling upon the shore, she said: 'God's will be done. He that defended me from wrong while I was on dry land amongst you, can guard me now from harm on the salt sea, though I know not how. He is as powerful as ever he was. In him I put my trust, and in the Virgin Mother, whose guidance shall be my rudder and my sail upon this voyage.'

Then she hushed her baby, which lay weeping in her arms.

'Peace, little son,' she said, 'I will not harm you'; and taking the kerchief from her ~~own~~ head, she laid it over his little face. Then, ~~t~~ulling him against her breast, she lifted her eyes to heaven:

'O Mary, maiden Mother!' she prayed, 'whose Son died for us upon the Cross, thy grief was greater far than mine; for thou sawest thy child slain before thine eyes, while mine yet lives; look down with pity then upon my little babe, thou who hast compassion upon all who are distressed. Alas, my little one, what have you done that your cruel father should slay you? Have mercy, dear Constable, and let my child stay here with you. Or, if you dare not keep him, yet kiss him once in his father's name.' Then she looked back towards the land. 'Farewell, cruel husband,'

she said, and rising from her knees she walked down the beach to the boat, hushing her baby as she went, the people pressing after her. Then, having bidden them farewell, she crossed herself and entered the vessel, which was well stocked with food and all other necessities for her voyage, and was driven out over the wide sea.

The Third Part

When King Alla came home from the wars soon afterwards, he went to the castle and asked ~~for~~ his wife and child. The Constable, whose heart grew cold at the question, told him all that had happened, showing him his own letter with the seal affixed. 'My lord,' he said, 'I did but what you commanded me on pain of death.' Then the messenger was called and put to the question, until he confessed how he had passed the night at Donegild's castle; and by enquiring further the King discovered who had forged the letter and planned this wicked deed. In his fury at learning the truth he slew his mother forthwith, and thus the treacherous Donegild came by her end.

Night and day Alla sorrowed for his wife and child; and they meanwhile were being driven in their ship far over the sea. For many a weary day they drifted in pain and

grief and peril of wind and wave, kept from starvation by the store of food which they had with them. Once the vessel came to land, and while it lay off the shore, Constance was molested by a pagan of that country who came on board her ship and tried to carry her off by force; but God gave her strength to defend herself and her child; the villain fell overboard in the struggle and was drowned, and the ship drifted out to sea again and was driven through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea, where for long it lay tossing upon the waves. But the end of her troubles was not far off.

Let us leave her for a while, and turn to her father, the Roman Emperor, who when he heard how the Christians in Syria had been murdered by the wicked old Sultanness, had at once sent his Senator with a large body of troops to avenge them. For many a day they wreaked vengeance upon the Syrians, burning, slaying and destroying, and when they had made an end, they set forth upon their voyage back to Rome. Now it chanced that in the course of their voyage they met the vessel in which Constance was drifting. The Senator did not know who she was, and she would tell him nothing; but he brought her with him to Rome, and placed her and her little boy under the care of his wife, who was really the aunt of

Constance, though she did not know her again, because she was so changed by her troubles. Here she lived happily for several years, spending her time in good works.

Meanwhile King Alla, who all this time had been mourning for his wife and child, had been overcome with repentance for having slain his mother, and at last had resolved to go to Rome and do penance, submitting himself to the Pope and asking God's forgiveness for all his sins. The news of his arrival was soon spread through Rome by the servants who preceded him to provide lodgings, and the Senator rode forth with many of the nobles to meet him, and after his arrival entertained him with great honour. The King in return invited the Senator to a feast, to which he went, taking with him little Maurice, the son of Constance. During the banquet the child, at his mother's bidding, stood close to Alla, gazing into his face. The King, looking upon the little boy, wondered greatly.

'Whose is that fair child yonder?' he asked the Senator.

'His mother I know,' the Senator answered, 'but not his father.' And he told the King how Constance had been found in the ship. 'Whoever she may be,' he added, 'I never knew another woman so good and true as she.'

Now the boy was as like as he could be to

Constance, and Alla, remembering her face, wondered whether the child's mother could possibly be his lost wife.

'I am dreaming,' he said: 'reason tells me that she must have been drowned. And yet who knows? God may have guided her here just as he first sent her to my own country.'

After the feast was over, he returned home with the Senator to find out if this wondrous thing were true. The Senator sent for Constance, whose feet would scarcely support her when she received the summons. As soon as Alla saw her he knew her again, and wept for joy; but Constance stood dumb before him, sorrow at his past cruelty shutting her heart against him, until she fell down in a sudden swoon. Then Alla weeping told her all the truth. 'I am as innocent of your sufferings,' he said, 'as my son here, Maurice, is like you in face.' Then, finding relief in tears, they wept together over all their sorrows; and after that they kissed each other a hundred times, and never was any joy in this world so great as theirs.

Constance then begged her husband to invite her father the Emperor to dine with him on the next day, without telling him that she had been found. On the following day, they rode out to meet him with great gladness, and when he drew near, Constance alighted in the street

and fell at his feet. 'Father,' she said, 'I am your daughter Constance, whom you sent to Syria long ago, and who was left to die upon the sea. Send me away no more, dear father, but thank my husband here for all his kindness to me.' Who can describe the joy of these three at the meeting?

Little remains to tell. The child Maurice in after years became Emperor and did great honour to the Christian Church; you may read his life in the old Roman chronicles. As for Constance, she returned with Alla to England, where for a time they lived together in peace and happiness. But no happiness can endure for ever. At the end of a year Alla died; may his soul find rest! Constance returned with a sorrowful heart to Rome, where, all her perils at an end, she lived safely with her father and her friends until her death, giving herself up to good works and holy charity. So ends my tale; God keep this company, and send us gladness after sorrow.

When the Man of Law had ended his tale, the Host, rising in his stirrups, praised it with a round oath for a good story, and called upon the Parson to tell the next tale. But the Parson only replied by rebuking him for his sinful swearing, upon which the Host taunted him with being a 'loller.'

‘Listen, good people!’ he cried, ‘this loller here will now preach us a sermon!’

‘Nay, by my father’s soul!’ said the Shipman, ‘he shall preach us no sermons here! I will tell you a story myself instead, and a merry one, that shall keep you all awake!’

When the Shipman had finished his tale, which was about a rascally trick played by a monk, the Host turned to the Prioress, addressing her with great politeness.

‘My lady Prioress,’ said he, ‘I should like to ask you, if I may make so bold, to tell us your story next. Will you, dear lady, have the kindness?’

‘Willingly,’ she said; and having first offered a prayer to God and to the blessed Virgin, asking for help and guidance in setting forth her glory, she began her tale.

THE PRIORESS’ TALE OF THE BOY MARTYR

In a certain city of Asia there was a Jews’ quarter, a whole street, that is, inhabited by Jews, who were allowed by the ruler of the country to live like this among the Christians in order that he might be able to borrow money from them;

for they made their living by usury, which is hateful to all good Christians. At one end of this street there was a little school, where a number of Christian children used to go to learn reading and singing, passing through the Jews' quarter day by day.

Now among these children was the son of a poor widow, a little boy of seven years old, who had been taught from his earliest years to hold the Virgin Mother in special reverence; he would always kneel down and say his *Ave Maria*, when he passed her image by the way-side; indeed, his piety was like that of Saint Nicholas, who at an equally tender age had so great a devotion for our Lord. One day this little boy, as he sat at his primer in school, heard some of the other children learning their anthem-book. They were singing the Latin hymn which is called *Alma Redemptoris*; and the little boy, coming as near as he dared, listened until he knew the words and the tune of the first verse by heart. He was too young to understand it, for as yet he knew no Latin; but one day he went to a school-fellow who was a little older than himself, and begged him to tell him its meaning. •

‘I know very little Latin,’ said the boy, ‘though I can sing the words; I learn singing, not grammar: but I have heard tell that it is

a hymn addressed to our blessed Lady, praising her and praying her to help us in the hour of death.' 'Is it indeed a hymn in honour of Christ's Mother?' said the child. 'Then I will do my very best to learn it all by heart before Christmas comes. Yes, even if I am scolded and beaten as much as three times in an hour for not knowing my primer, I will learn it, for our Lady's sake.'

Day by day, as they went home together from the school, his friend taught him the hymn, until he knew it all by heart, and could sing it out clear and loud, both words and tune; and his heart was so full of love for our Lady that he used to sing it every day as he went backwards and forwards to school through the Jews' quarter.

Now as he went singing like this upon his way, Satan the enemy of mankind, lurking like a venomous wasp in the hearts of the Jews, stirred them up to anger against him.

'Shame on you, people of the Hebrews,' said he, 'that this child should walk among you as he pleases, singing things which are an insult to your religion!'

From that time forward the Jews plotted the murder of the little innocent, and hired an assassin, who, lurking hidden in an alley, seized hold of the poor child as he went by, held him

fast and cut his throat, and then threw his body into a pit.

All that night the poor widow waited for her little son, but he did not come; and as soon as it was daylight, she set out with an anxious heart, her face pale with fear, to search for him. She went to the school, and looked in every other place where the child was likely to be, but nowhere could she find him. At last she heard that he had been last seen in the Jews' quarter, and there she went to search for him, half out of her mind with grief and terror, calling upon the Virgin Mother to help her, and begging all the Jews who lived there to tell her whether her child had passed that way. They all said that they had not seen him; but God in his mercy put it into her mind to call out her son's name, close to the pit into which his body had been thrown.

And then a great miracle befell; for the child, lying there with his throat cut, suddenly began to sing his hymn so clear and loud that all the place rang with the sound.

The Christian people who were passing by came together to see this wonderful thing, and sent at once for the provost of the town, who came in haste. When he had seen the miracle he praised Christ and the Virgin Mother, and

commanded that the Jews should be seized and bound.

The child, still singing his hymn, was taken up amid piteous lamentation, and carried in procession with great honour to the nearest abbey; where the bier was placed in front of the high altar, while the mother lay swooning beside it and scarcely could be torn away.

Meanwhile, at the provost's command, the Jews who had taken part in this murder were drawn by wild horses and then hanged according to the law. Such wickedness must have the punishment which it deserves.

The bier lay before the high altar during the celebration of mass, and then the abbot and his monks prepared to bury the child. And still, after they had sprinkled him with holy water, he went on singing *Alma Redemptoris*.

Then the abbot, who was a holy man, as all monks are, or ought to be, spoke to the child.

'I adjure you, dear child,' he said, 'in the name of the Holy Trinity, to tell me why you sing like this, after your throat is cut.'

'My throat indeed is cut to the bone,' the child replied, 'and I should be dead long ago, but that our Lord, desiring his glory to be kept in remembrance, permits me still to sing this hymn in honour of his dear Mother. She,

the fount of mercy, whom I have always loved as well as I knew how, came to me when I was dying and told me to sing this hymn; and when I had sung it, methought she laid a grain of corn under my tongue.

“My little child,” she said, “be not afraid, I will never forsake you, but will come and fetch you when this grain is taken from your tongue.” Until the grain is taken away, therefore, I must go on singing in her honour.’

Then the good abbot, laying hold of the child's tongue, took away the grain; and the life passed softly out of him. On seeing this great miracle, the abbot was moved so that the tears rained down his face, and he fell to the ground, together with all his monks, weeping and praising the Virgin Mother. Afterwards, rising up, they took the martyr from his bier, and they buried his little body in a tomb of fair marble. There he lies now; God grant us to meet him in Heaven!

And do thou, young Hugh of Lincoln, who wast slain by Jews, like this child, but a short while ago, pray God to have mercy on us weak and sinful folk, for the sake of Mary his Mother! Amen.

All the company were very grave for a while after the Prioress had finished her story; but

presently the Host began to be merry again, and he turned to me. 'What kind of a man are you, always staring down at the ground as if you were looking for a hare?' said he; 'come near, look up, and be cheerful. Make way, sirs, give the man place. He has as well rounded a waist as my own,—a fine figure indeed for any pretty woman to embrace! But he has an absent look, and talks to no one. Come, tell us a story, as the rest have done.'

Upon this I replied that I knew only one story, and that was a ballad which I had learnt long ago. The Host bade me say on, and accordingly I recited the Rime of Sir Thopas, telling how that jewel of knighthood, with complexion white and red, and with clothes that well became him, rode through a forest and heard the birds sing; how he lighted from his horse and slept, and dreamt of an elf-queen, and vowed that he would find her and be her lover; how he at last found fairy-land, but encountered there the giant Sir Olifant, a very perilous man, who threatened him and threw stones at him from his sling; how he hastily returned to get his armour, and was armed with all due ceremonies, vowing death to the giant; how he rode forth again and would sleep in no house, and like the good knight

Sir Percival would drink nothing but water of the well. But at this point the Host cut me short.

‘No more of this,’ said he, ‘I am weary of your nonsense; my ears ache with listening to your trashy doggerel.’

I protested that I could do no better, but at the Host’s command I consented to tell a prose story instead, and related the moral tale of Melibeus, whose wife Prudence persuaded him to forgive the enemies who had grievously injured him.

‘I would give a barrel of ale, I swear,’ cried the Host when this long and virtuous story was finished, ‘if my dear good wife could have heard that tale! She has no notion of such meekness! When I beat one of my serving-men, she will bring me a great clubbed stick and bid me break all his bones; and if a neighbour will not bow to her in church, or offends her in any other way, she comes home in a rage and calls upon me to revenge her. Some day I know she will make me kill somebody, for I am a dangerous man when I have a knife in my hand, though I dare not stand up to my wife. But enough of this,’ said he, ‘we will waste no more time. See, Rochester is close at hand! You, my lord Monk, shall tell the next tale. Draw near, sir, whatever

you are called—sir John, sir Thomas, sir Alban,—I know not your name, but I warrant you a person of importance when you are at home, no poor novice or cloisterer; a fine figure of a man, by my faith, and fed in a fat pasture!’

‘I will endeavour,’ the worthy Monk replied, ‘to relate to you some tragedies, of which I have a hundred at least at home. By tragedies I mean stories such as we find in old books of men who have fallen from prosperity and high estate and perished miserably; some we have in verse, and others in prose. But first I must entreat you to pardon my ignorance if I tell these stories, whether of popes or kings, not in order of time but as they come into my remembrance.’

THE MONK'S TALE

The Monk then related a great number of stories, collected both from past history and from his own times, about those who have fallen from their greatness, or else met with violent deaths in the height of their prosperity. He told of Lucifer, who fell from heaven; of Sampson, who was betrayed by a woman to his enemies; of Hercules, slain by a poisoned

shirt; of King Pedro of Spain, who was killed by his own brother; of Bernabò Visconti, the scourge of Lombardy, who was taken captive by his nephew and thrown into prison, where he died.

‘But most miserable of all,’ he said, ‘was the fate of Count Ugolino of Pisa. A little way out of Pisa there stands a tower, where he was imprisoned by his enemies, together with his three little sons, the eldest scarcely five years old. Here they were shut up, and there was given to them each day a pittance of food and water which barely sufficed to keep them alive. At last there came a day when no food was brought to them; and at the time when it usually came, the Count heard the doors of the tower being locked. He said nothing of it, but the thought flashed into his mind that they were going to be starved to death, and the tears ran down his face. “Alas!” he exclaimed, “that ever I was born!”

‘His little son of three years old saw his tears.

“Father, why are you crying?” he asked; “and when will the gaoler bring our food? Is there not a morsel of bread left? I am too hungry to sleep. I wish that I could sleep for ever, for then I should not feel hungry any more. There is nothing that I would rather have except a piece of bread.”

But day after day passed by, and no food came, and the child died at last in his father's arms. Then the unhappy father bit into the flesh of his arms for very grief, cursing the fortune which had brought him such suffering; while his two remaining children, thinking that it was for hunger he gnawed his arms, begged him to take their flesh to eat and not his own. But before long they also died of hunger, lying across their father's knees; and last of all the Count himself died. Whosoever desires to hear the tale at greater length, let him read it as told by Dante, the great Italian poet.

When the Monk had told several more stories of the same sort, of Nero and of Holofernes, of Alexander, Julius Cæsar and Cræsus, the Knight at last interrupted him.

'Stop!' said he, 'good sir, no more of this; we have had enough, and too much. For myself, I think it a sad and grievous thing to hear of the misfortunes of those who have been prosperous: whereas to hear of a man rising from poverty to good fortune is pleasant.'

'Ay, by the bell of St Paul's, you are right!' said the Host; 'this Monk talks of "tragedies" and "clouded fortune" and I don't know what; but where is the use of bewailing the past? There is no pleasure, as you say, in hearing of sorrow. No more, of it, sir Monk! Your tales

are an annoyance to the whole company; there is no amusement in such talk; but for the jingling of the bells upon your bridle I should have gone to sleep and fallen off my horse before now, were the slough never so deep; and then your story would have been told in vain, for I am the judge of the tales. So, sir Monk, or Dan Piers, if that is your name, tell us another story; something about hunting, I pray you.'

'Nay,' said the Monk, 'I have no mind to be merry. Let some one else tell his tale, as I have told mine.'

At this the Host called out in boisterous tones to the Nuns' Priest.

'Come near, you priest, sir John,' he said, 'and cheer our hearts with some merry tale. Be cheerful, even though your horse is a jade. What matter if he be lean and ugly, so he serves you? Keep a merry heart always!'

'Yes, Host,' said he; 'in truth I must be merry, else I shall be blamed.'

And without further delay he began his story.

THE NUNS' PRIEST'S TALE OF CHANTICLEER

In a little cottage in a valley, close beside a wood, there lived once a poor and aged widow, who since her husband's death had led a frugal and industrious life, working hard to keep herself and her two daughters from want. Her means were slender, and her possessions small; she owned three cows, three large sows, a sheep called Mall, a cock, and some hens; and the profits just sufficed her for a simple livelihood. The two cottage rooms where she ate and slept were black with smoke; her fare was plain and wholesome; dainties she never tasted, over-eating never made her ill, and since she drank no wine, she suffered neither from gout nor apoplexy, and needed no physic save her frugal diet, her exercise, and her cheerfulness of mind. Her meals were generally of milk and bread, with some fried bacon now and then, and an egg or two.

Adjoining the cottage there was a yard, surrounded by a fence and a dry ditch, where the widow kept her poultry, seven hens and a cock named Chanticleer, who had not his equal for crowing in all the countryside; his voice

was as merry as a church organ at Mass, and his crowing as punctual as the chiming of an abbey clock. His comb was redder than coral, and notched like the battlements of a castle; his bill was black, and shone like jet, his legs and feet were azure blue, his claws lily white, and his feathers like burnished gold.



Feeding Chickens

The seven hens whom this gentle cock had under him were very much like him in colour; and the one whose throat showed the fairest hues of all was called dame Partlet. She was courteous, discreet and amiable, and Chanticleer's heart was bound up in her. It was a joy to hear them at sunrise singing together, 'My love is far away,'—for in those days, as

I am told, beasts and birds were able to talk and sing as we do.

One day at dawn Chanticleer, as he sat among his wives on the perch in the cottage room, began to groan in his throat like a man troubled by a nightmare, so that Partlet, who sat by his side, was frightened to hear him.

‘Dear heart,’ said she, ‘what ails you that you groan like that? Fie on you for a restless sleeper!’

‘Madam,’ said he, ‘I entreat your pardon; but I had such a terrible dream just now that the very thought of it still frightens me. I dreamt that as I roamed about in our yard, I saw a dreadful beast who tried to seize and kill me. He was like a dog, tawny red except for the black tips to his ears, with glowing eyes and a pointed muzzle. This no doubt was the reason why I groaned; I am still nearly frightened to death at the thought of him.’

‘Now shame upon you for a coward!’ said she; ‘now you have lost my love indeed. I cannot love a coward. Whatever we women may say, we all want our husbands to be wise and valiant, not fools and cowards, frightened at every shadow. How dare you confess that you are frightened by a dream? Dreams mean nothing; they generally come from indigestion or some other disorder, which no doubt is the

cause of yours. Many people are troubled in the same way, crying out in their sleep for fear of wild beasts, or fire, or arrows, bulls, or bears, or black devils trying to catch them. But Cato, who was a wise man, bids us take no notice of dreams; so do not be afraid, I beg you, but take my advice, and in the morning when we fly down from the rafters, eat a few worms, and then some of the herbs which I will find for you growing in our yard. Take these for a day or two, and you will soon be restored to health.'

'Madam,' he replied, 'I thank you for your advice. But as to Cato, who bids us take no notice of dreams, many a writer more learned than he says just the opposite, that dreams often come true.

'One tells the story of two friends who were once going upon a pilgrimage together, and came to a town where the inns were so crowded that they could not both find beds in the same house, but were obliged to part company for the night, each taking whatever lodging he could get. One of them was fortunate enough to find a bed at an inn, but the other one had to sleep in a cattle-stall in a stable yard.

'In the middle of the night the one who was sleeping at the inn dreamt that his comrade called to him, saying, "Alas! I shall be murdered

to-night here in this cattle-stall, unless you come quickly and help me !”

‘He started from his sleep in terror, but when he was fully awake, he told himself that it was only a dream, and lay down to sleep again. Twice he dreamt the same thing; but the third time he thought that his friend stood beside him and said, “I am now slain; look at my bleeding wounds! Rise early in the morning and go to the west gate of the town. There you will see a cart loaded with manure, under which my body is hidden. Stop it boldly. I have been murdered for the sake of my money.”

‘Now believe me, this dream came true. Next morning as soon as it was light the traveller went straight to the inn where his friend had lodged, and made his way to the cattle-stall to call him. But only the inn-keeper came in answer to his call.

“‘Sir,” said he, “your friend is gone. He left the town at daybreak.”

‘Then, remembering his dream, suspicion arose in his mind, and he hurried at once to the west gate of the town. Here he found a cart loaded with manure passing out into the country, just as his friend had told him in his dream, and, his suspicions being thus confirmed, he cried out boldly for justice.

““My friend was murdered last night,” he

cried, "and his body is hidden in this cart! Justice! My friend has been slain!"

'A crowd assembled, and the cart was stopped and overturned, and there hidden under the load they found the body of the murdered man. Murder will out; so hateful a crime cannot be hid. The carter and the inn-keeper, being put to the torture, confessed their crime, and both were hanged. This story teaches us to pay attention to dreams.

'In the same book there is yet another story, of two men who wished to cross the sea to a distant country, but were delayed by contrary winds in a certain seaport town. One evening the wind changed into the right quarter for their voyage, and they went to bed resolved to sail early the next morning. But in the night, a little before daybreak, one of them had a strange dream. He dreamt that a man stood by his bed side and told him to put off his journey, saying, "If you set out to-morrow, you will be drowned." Waking up, he told his dream to his friend, who was lying beside him, and begged him not to sail that day. But his friend laughed at him.

"No dream shall frighten me into changing my plans," said he. "I care not a straw for your dreams. A dream means nothing; people are always dreaming of things which never

happen. But, as I see you are determined to stay here and waste your time by your folly, I must e'en bid you good day."

'Taking his leave he went his way; but half way through his voyage the ship was wrecked and went down with all on board.

'You may learn, dear Partlet, from these examples, and from many others I could tell you, of Saint Kenelm, for example, and Scipio. of Daniel, Joseph and Cræsus, that people ought to pay attention to dreams. I am quite sure that this dream of mine will bring me some misfortune; as for your herbs, they are no better than poison, and I refuse to touch them. But enough of this. When I look upon your fair face, dear love, and see the scarlet around your eyes, all my fears vanish away, and I am so happy that I can defy my dream.'

With that, since it was now daylight, he flew down from the rafter, and finding a grain of corn in the yard he began to cluck to his hens, calling them to his side. He forgot all his fears, and looked as proud as a prince and as fierce as a lion, strutting to and fro on the tips of his toes, disdaining to set foot to the ground, and whenever he found a grain of corn clucking to his wives, who came running to him. So let us leave him, ruling over his yard like a prince in his palace.

It was the third day of May when misfortune came upon him. Chanticleer, strutting in all his pride among his wives, and seeing by the sun that it was nine o'clock, crowed merrily and loud.

'The sun,' said he, 'is already high in the sky, and my heart is glad of the spring. Listen, dear Partlet, to the happy song of the birds, and look at the fresh blown flowers!'

But all at once his joy was changed into terror. On the night before a cunning and wicked fox, who for three years past had lived in the wood near by, had broken through the hedge into the yard. All that morning he had lain hidden in a patch of herbs, like a wicked murderer lurking in his den, waiting his time to spring upon Chanticleer. Alas! He should have taken warning by his dream.

Chanticleer was crowing with all his might, while fair Partlet lay in the sun with her sisters, bathing herself in the sand, when suddenly, while looking after a butterfly hovering among the herbs, he caught sight of the fox crouching there. He had no more mind for crowing; with a cry of 'cok, cok!' he started back in terror, and would have fled without an instant's delay but that the fox spoke to him.

'Fair sir,' said he, 'why should you run away from me? I am your friend; I wish you

nothing but good. My only reason for being here is to listen to your singing, for your voice is like an angel's. My lord your father (heaven rest his soul!) and your lady mother have in past days given me the pleasure of visiting at my house, and I would gladly be of service to you if I could. Never, as I live, have I heard any one except yourself sing so well as your father did in the morning. His crowing came straight from his heart; he would stand on tip-toe with closed eyes and outstretched neck to make his voice the louder. And then he was so wise, there was no cock in all history to be compared with him. Now I beg you, sir, in charity to sing, and let me judge if you are your father's equal.'

Chanticleer was too much pleased by this flattery to see the treachery which lay behind it. Standing on tip-toe he clapped his wings, stretched out his neck, shut his eyes tightly, and crowed with all his might. Then up sprang Russel the fox, caught him by the throat, threw him over his back, and made off with him towards the wood.

Never was there such a lamentation as that which rose from the hens in the yard when they saw poor Chanticleer carried off. Dame Partlet lifted up her voice above them all, and shrieked louder than Hasdrubal's wife, who,

when her husband was slain at the burning of Carthage, threw herself into the flames for grief and perished with him.

The widow and her daughters, hearing the outcry, ran out and saw the fox carrying off the cock on his back towards the wood. Calling for help they gave chase; others ran up with sticks; Malkin followed, her distaff in her hand, Colle the dog, the cow and the calf; the very pigs, frightened by the noise of shouting and the barking of dogs, ran also, with hideous squeals. The ducks screamed as if they were being killed, the geese flew away in terror over the trees, and a swarm of bees came out of the hive; so terrible was the noise, the shrieking and yelling and sounding of horns, that it seemed as if the sky would fall; there was more clamour than Jack Straw and his men made over killing the Flemings.

But listen, good people, and hear how the highest hopes may be defeated. The terrified cock, lying across the fox's back, heard the noise of the pursuers as he was carried off into the wood.

'Sir,' said he, 'if I were you I would turn round and defy them, and bid them go back; "A plague upon you, insolent fellows!" I would say, "in spite of you all I have reached the wood; and as for the cock, he is mine, and I mean to eat him up."' "

‘By my faith, so I will,’ said the fox; and as he opened his mouth to speak, the cock broke from his jaws, and flew up into the branches of a high tree.

‘Alas, Chanticleer!’ cried the fox, ‘I freely confess that I did wrong to frighten you by catching you and carrying you off from the yard. But indeed, sir, I meant you no harm. Only come down and listen to me, and I will tell you what my true reason was for acting as I did.’

‘Beshrew me if I do!’ replied the cock, ‘You shall not deceive me twice, I promise you, nor flatter me into shutting my eyes again to crow. He that shuts his eyes when he ought to keep them open deserves all that he will get.’

‘And he that talks when he ought, to hold his tongue deserves no better,’ said the fox.

Now this story teaches us not to be careless and not to trust in flatterers; and if you think it a foolish tale about a cock and a fox, think of the moral: it is all written, as St Paul says, for our learning, so leave the chaff and take the grain.

THE THIRD DAY

THE WIFE OF BATH'S PROLOGUE

Before the wife of Bath began her tale, she told the company at full length her experiences of married life, of which she knew a great deal; for she was first married, she said, when she was only twelve years old, and had been wedded in all no less than five times. She went on to boast how she had lorded it over all her five husbands, and by means of threats and abuse had made them do whatever she chose, and provide her with money, fine clothes, and gay fairings.

Her fourth husband, she said, died when she came back from her pilgrimage to Jerusalem; she had made the acquaintance of her fifth, a young clerk of Oxford, one Lent, when he was lodging in the town with her friend and gossip, whom she often went to visit. At this season of the year she loved to be much in company, to see and be seen.

to wear her gay scarlet clothes, and to frequent wakes, preachings, and processions; to make pilgrimages, too, and to go to miracle plays and weddings.

This clerk, whose name was Jankyn, was only twenty years of age, and she was forty; he was poor, and she was rich, for her former husbands had been well-to-do men; but it was for love and not for money that she married him.

‘But afterwards,’ she said, ‘when I had passed over all my property to him, I repented it sorely, for he would do nothing to please me, and scolded me for gadding about from house to house, as I had always done, and continued to do, in spite of all that he could say. He was always preaching at me, and quoting old Roman stories and texts from the Bible against gadding wives. But I cannot bear to be found fault with, and it was little heed I paid to his proverbs and old stories.

‘But I must tell you how it came about once that I tore his book, and he gave me the blow which has left me deaf in one ear.

‘He had a book, or rather several books bound in one large volume, which he was very fond of reading, and over which he would sit and laugh all day. It was full of stories about bad wives; for no clerk will ever speak well of

women. Who painted the lion? tell me that. If women wrote books, they would be all about the wickedness of men. One night Jankyn sat by the fire reading me stories out of this book about wives who have murdered or ruined their husbands; until at last, seeing that he meant to go on reading it all night, I lost all patience, and seizing the wretched book I tore three leaves out of it, at the same time striking him in the face so that he fell backwards into the fire. Up he sprang as fierce as a lion, and dealt me such a blow with his fist that I fell stunned to the ground. When he saw how still I lay, he was frightened, and would have run away, but I soon woke from my swoon.

“False thief!” said I, “have you murdered me for my money?”

“Dear Alison,” he said, kneeling down beside me, “I will never strike you again. You have yourself to blame that I have done it this once. I beg you to forgive me.”

‘From that time forward I had the mastery over him, and in the end I ruled the house, the property and himself, and made him burn his book. After that we lived in perfect peace and harmony; he obeyed me in everything, and I was as kind and true to him as any wife in the world, and he was the same to me. And now for my story.’

The Friar laughed.

‘This is a long preamble to a story, dame!’ he said.

‘A fly and a friar must be for ever meddling where they are not wanted,’ said the Summoner, ‘What is this about preambles? Amble or trot, as you please, or sit down if you like. You spoil our sport by your interruptions.’

‘Now, by my faith, master Summoner,’ said the Friar, ‘I will tell a tale or two about a summoner before I have done, which shall make the company laugh at your expense.’

‘And beshrew me, Friar,’ returned the Summoner, ‘if I do not tell some stories about friars before we get to Sittingbourne, which will put you out of temper.’

‘Peace!’ cried the Host, ‘let the woman tell her story. You are behaving as if you were drunk! Go on, dame, tell your tale.’

‘I am ready, sir,’ said she, ‘with this worthy Friar’s leave.’

‘Tell on, dame,’ said he, ‘I will listen.’

THE WIFE OF BATH'S TALE

WHAT WOMEN LOVE BEST

Long ago, in the days of King Arthur, famous among the Britons, the whole country was full of fairies; the fairy queen danced with her merry company in many a green meadow. But this was many hundred years ago; nobody sees any fairies nowadays, for they have been driven away by the holy friars, who go everywhere, blessing towns and villages, barns and castles, byres and dairies; so that where a fairy used to walk, there now walks a friar, saying his prayers as he goes a-begging.

Now, it happened that a certain knight of King Arthur's court lay under sentence of death for an act of violence which he had committed, and would have lost his head according to the law, but that the queen and her ladies begged the king to pardon him. Their entreaties were so earnest that the king at last granted the knight his life, and gave him up to the queen, that she might save or slay him as she chose. The queen, having thanked him upon her knees, sent for the knight.

‘Your life,’ said she, ‘is still in danger ; but I will spare it and set you free if you can tell me the right answer to this question: What is it that women most desire? Be careful, or you may still lose your head ; if you cannot give me the answer at once, you shall have a year and a day in which to find it out. Only, before you go, you must promise to come back and give yourself up at the end of the time.’

At this the knight was very sorrowful ; but since there was no help for it, he made up his mind to try, and taking his leave he went his way, promising to return at the end of the year with the best answer he could find.

He rode about the country enquiring everywhere what it is that women most desire, but no two people were agreed in the answers they gave him. Some said ‘riches,’ some ‘honour,’ some ‘gaiety,’ some ‘fine clothes.’ Some again said that what we love best is flattery, and that answer is very near the truth, for flattery is what we all like, high and low. Some said that what we most desire is liberty ; and some that our greatest delight is to be thought worthy of confidence, and incapable of betraying a secret, though that is a pretence not worth a rake-handle, for we women can never keep a secret, as King Midas found out to his cost. Will you hear his story, as Ovid tells it ?

Midas had two ass's ears growing on his head under his long hair, which he was careful to hide from everybody except his wife. To her only he confided the secret, begging her to tell nobody else of his deformity. She swore that to gain the whole world she would never betray him; but for all that she thought she would die of keeping the secret to herself. It swelled within her heart until she felt as if it must needs burst from her, and since she dared not tell it to anybody, she hastened to a marsh near by, and laid her lips close down to the water, like a bittern booming in the mire.

'Do not betray me, water,' she said, 'I tell it only to thee. My husband has two long ass's ears! Now that the secret is out my heart is at ease again; truly I could keep it no longer.'

If you want to know the rest of the story you must read it in Ovid; but you may see from this that we women cannot keep a secret for long.

The knight grew very sad at not being able to find out the right answer to the queen's question; the time passed by, and the day came at last when he was obliged to turn homewards. It chanced that his way lay through a forest, and in the middle of this

forest he suddenly caught sight of a company of ladies, four-and-twenty or more, dancing. He rode up, hoping to find out the answer to his riddle from them, but before he reached the spot the whole company had vanished, he could not tell where. No living creature was to be seen except an old woman, the ugliest that can be imagined, sitting upon the grass.

This old woman rose to meet him.

‘There is no road here, sir knight,’ she said; ‘what seek you? It may perhaps be of advantage to you to tell me, for we old folk know a great many things.’

‘Good mother,’ said the knight, ‘I am a dead man unless I can find out what it is that women most desire. Tell me that, and I will reward you well.’

‘Only give me your promise,’ said she, ‘to do the next thing I ask of you, whatever it be, if it lies in your power, and I will tell you the right answer before night-fall.’

‘I give you my word,’ said the knight.

‘In that case,’ said she, ‘your neck is safe; for I wager my life that both the queen and all the proudest ladies of her court will confess that my answer is the right one. Let us go forward without delay.’

Then she whispered her secret in his ear, and told him to keep a good heart.

When they reached the court, the knight sought audience of the queen, saying that he had returned as he had promised, and was ready to give his answer. A great company assembled to hear him, all the ladies of the court, maidens, wives, and widows, with the queen herself throned like a judge in the midst of them. Then the knight was summoned, silence was commanded, and he was called upon to say in the presence of them all what it is that women most desire.

‘My liege lady,’ said he, speaking in manly tones which were clearly heard by the whole assembly, ‘what a woman loves best is power, and what she most desires is to rule, whether it be over her husband or her lover. That is the true answer, though you slay me for it. And now do as you will with me; I am subject to your will.’

There was no lady in all the court, neither maid, wife, nor widow, who could say that he was wrong; they all agreed that he had saved his life by his answer. Then up started the old woman whom he had found sitting on the grass.

‘Mercy, my lady queen,’ she cried, ‘do me justice before your court departs! It was I who told him this answer, and he in return gave me his promise to do the first thing

I should ask of him, if it lay in his power. And now, sir knight, before all this company, I ask you to make me your wife; deny my claim if you can!’

‘Alas!’ the knight replied, ‘such indeed was my promise; but I implore you, for Heaven’s sake, to ask some other boon. Take all my possessions, if you will, but let me go free!’

‘Nay,’ said the old hag, ‘beshrew me if I do! Old and poor and ugly as I am, I would rather be your wife and your love than have all the gold in the world.’

‘My love! Nay, rather my curse!’ said he; ‘alas, that one of my lineage should come to such dishonour!’

But nothing he could say was of any use; he was obliged to keep his word and marry her.

There was no feasting or rejoicing at the wedding, only sorrow and heaviness. He married her as privately as he could, and hid himself away all day afterwards like an owl, he was so disgusted by his bride’s ugliness.

‘Dear husband,’ she said to him at last, when evening was come and they were left alone together, ‘is it the custom of King Arthur’s knights to behave like this to their wives? Are they all so hard to please? I am your own love and your wife; I saved your life,

and have never done you any harm. Why do you treat me in this unkind way? What is my fault? Tell me, and it shall be amended.'

'Amended!' said the knight; 'alas! old age, low birth, and ugliness are faults that can never be amended. What wonder that I am mournful, wedded to such a bride?'

'Is that the reason of your sadness?' she asked.

'Yes,' said he, 'and no wonder!'

'All this,' she said, 'I could quickly set right if I chose, would you but treat me properly. But, concerning the low birth for which you blame me, you seem only to value the gentleness which comes from a rich ancestry, and to imagine that high birth makes you a gentleman. Such pride is folly. You should look rather to the man who is most virtuous, and strives most earnestly to do gentle deeds, and take him for the greatest gentleman. It is the will of Christ our Lord that all our true gentleness should be derived from him, not from our ancestors; for whatever wealth we may inherit from them, they cannot bequeath to us the virtuous lives by which they have earned the name of gentlemen, and set us a noble example. It has been truly said by Dante, the wise poet of Florence, that all our gentleness must come from God alone, and cannot be bequeathed to us; for if

gentleness of heart were implanted by nature in certain families, they could never fail to do gentle deeds; whereas we know well that a lord's son often acts wickedly. Gentle deeds make a gentleman; and he who does evil is a churl, be his birth what it may.

‘Therefore, dear husband, although I may be low-born, yet God may grant me grace to live virtuously; and if I do gentle deeds, then am I gentle.

‘As for the poverty for which you blame me, remember that the high King of Heaven, whom we all worship, chose to live his earthly life in poverty; and the way of life he chose cannot be evil. Cheerful poverty is a blessed lot; he that is content to be poor is rich, though he have not a shirt to his back; it is the covetous man who is truly poor, for he is always desiring more than he can have. Poverty is a blessing in disguise, and a school of wisdom to the man who accepts it patiently, often teaching him to know himself and his God, and to distinguish his true friends. Blame me no more, then, for my poverty.

‘Next you reproach me for being old and ugly. Yet you gentle knights maintain that honour is due to old age; you call an old man “father.” And if I am old and ugly, I am all the more likely to be a good and faithful wife

to you, since I shall have the fewer temptations to seek amusement away from home.

‘So choose, now; will you have me old and ugly as I am, but a true and obedient wife; or will you have me young and beautiful, taking your chance of the mischief that my flighty ways may bring you?’

The knight considered, and sighed.

‘My dear wife and lady,’ he said at last, ‘I place myself in your hands. Choose for yourself the course you think most honourable and pleasant to us both. I am content with whatever you desire.’

‘Then I have the upper hand,’ said she, ‘since I may choose as I like?’

‘Yes, wife,’ said he, ‘I think that is best.’

‘Kiss me,’ she said, ‘we will quarrel no longer. For you shall have both,—I will be both good and beautiful. From this time forward I will be as true a wife to you as ever lived upon this earth, and as beautiful as any lady in the world. Look at me, and see.’

The knight, looking at her, saw that she spoke the truth; and, overjoyed to find his bride so young and fair, he caught her in his arms and kissed her a thousand times. And she obeyed him in everything from that day forward, and they lived happily together all their lives. May Heaven send all of us loving

and obedient husbands; and a plague upon the men who will not be ruled by their wives!

All this time the Friar had been scowling at the Summoner.

‘Long life to you, dame!’ he said to the Wife of Bath when she had finished her story, ‘what you say is good sense. And now, since preaching would here be out of place, I will tell you, if it pleases the company to listen, a story about a summoner. No good, as we all know, is ever heard of a summoner, who earns his living by going all over the country with writs against sinners, and gets a beating in every town.’

‘Now, sir Friar!’ the Host said, ‘mind your manners, as a man of your profession ought in company; let us have no quarrelling here; tell your tale, and let the Summoner be!’

‘Nay, let him abuse me as much as he likes,’ said the Summoner, ‘I will pay him back in full when my turn comes; I will let him see what kind of an honour it is to be a false, flattering friar!’

‘Peace!’ said our Host, ‘go on with your tale, master Friar.’

THE FRIAR'S TALE OF THE SUM- MONER AND THE FIEND

There lived once in my part of the country an archdeacon, a man of high rank, who was very severe in his punishment of the evil-doers in his diocese, and inflicted so many fines for witchcraft, usury, neglect of Church services, and other sins, that everybody cried out against his extortions.

This archdeacon had under him a summoner as clever and cunning as any in England. He employed spies everywhere, to tell him of the evil-doers upon whom he might inflict fines. He never paid his master half what he collected, for he used to go to people privately and extort fines from them without the archdeacon's knowledge, and they would feast him and fill his purse in order to escape punishment. The list of scoundrels whom he knew would take two years to go through. In short, he was a summoner, which is another name for a rogue.

One day this summoner was riding through the forest to summon a poor widow on some false charge or other, which he had trumped up against her in hope of extorting something, when he overtook a yeoman, also on horseback,

dressed in green, carrying a bow and arrows, and wearing on his head a hat with black fringes. The two exchanged friendly greetings.

‘Whither are you bound?’ the yeoman asked: ‘have you far to go to-day?’

‘No,’ said the summoner, ‘I am only going to a cottage near by to collect rent for my lord.’

‘Are you a bailiff, then?’ enquired the stranger.

‘Yes,’ replied the summoner, not daring for very shame to confess his true calling.

‘Well met, brother!’ cried the yeoman, ‘I am a bailiff too, so if you are willing let us make friends. I am a stranger to this part of the country, but in my own home I am a man of means, and if ever you visit our shire, you shall be free of all I have.’

‘I thank you heartily,’ said the summoner; and having shaken hands and sworn eternal friendship they rode forward on their way. Presently the summoner, who was inquisitive and talkative, began to question his new friend.

‘Tell me where you live,’ he said, ‘in case I should some day come to visit you.’

‘Far away in the north country,’ the yeoman answered softly, ‘and I hope to see you there some day. Before we part I will tell you the way to my house, so that you cannot miss it.’

‘And now, brother,’ the summoner said, ‘since you too are a bailiff, tell me as we ride on our way what you find the best trick for making money in your profession.’

‘I will tell you frankly,’ replied the other; ‘my wages are small, the work is hard, and my master is very severe; so in order to gain a livelihood I have to get all I can by trickery and extortion.’

‘Why, it is just the same with me!’ said the summoner, ‘I get all the money I can, I care not how; I have no scruples about it, nor ask for shrift; beshrew all these father-confessors! But tell me your name, dear brother.’

The yeoman smiled a little.

‘Shall I tell you indeed? Well then, I am a fiend, and my home is in hell; but I ride about on earth, taking anything that men will give me. Like you, I get my profits by whatever means I can; and in pursuit of my prey I would ride to the world’s end.’

‘Bless me!’ cried the summoner, ‘I thought you were a yeoman! Have you fiends bodily shapes, then, as we mortals have?’

‘We have no fixed shape,’ the fiend replied, ‘but we can appear in any form we like; sometimes we take the shape of a man, sometimes of an angel, sometimes of an ape, whatever is best to capture our prey.’

‘And why do you take all this trouble?’ the summoner asked.

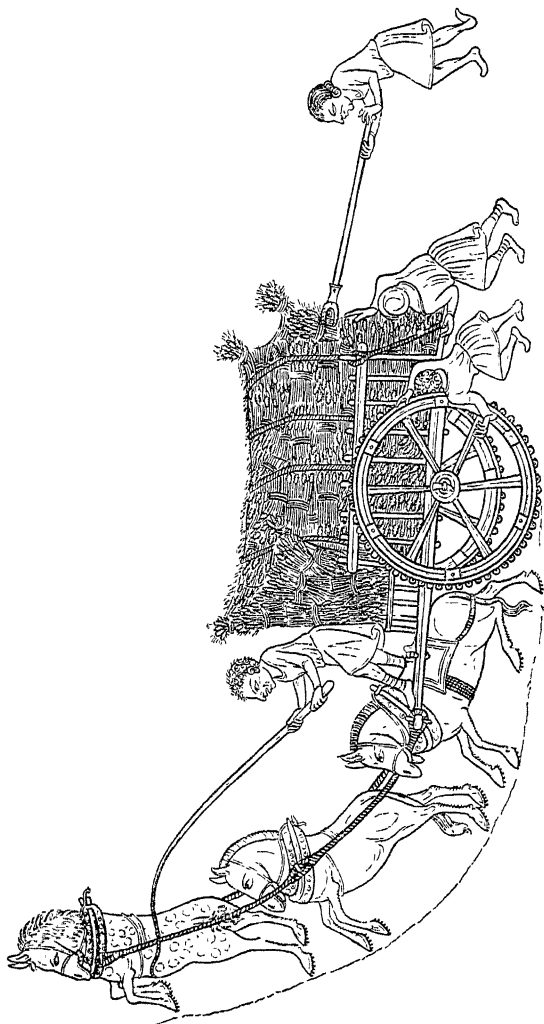
‘For many reasons, sir summoner; you would not understand them now, even if I told you; but you shall know all about us before long. There is a time for everything; the morning is well advanced and as yet I have gained nothing to-day. Let us ride on, therefore; for I will still keep you company, until you want to be rid of me.’

‘Nay, that will never be,’ the summoner said, ‘I have sworn to be your friend, and I will keep my word, if you were Satan himself. Let us both go about our business; you shall take whatever people are willing to give you, and I whatever I can get; and if one of us gains more than the other, we will share the profits alike.’

‘Agreed,’ said the fiend, and they rode on.

When they reached the entrance of the village to which the summoner was bound, they saw a cart loaded with hay, stuck fast in the deep mire of the road. The carter was whipping his horses and shouting to them like mad.

‘Come up, Brock! come up, Scot! A plague on you for the trouble you give me! The devil take you, cart and horses and hay and all!’ ‘Now we shall have some fun!’ thought the summoner, and approaching the fiend he whispered in his ear.



Carting Corn

‘Listen, brother,’ said he, ‘did you not hear what the carter said? Take it quickly, for he gave it to you, cart and horses and hay and all!’

‘Nay,’ replied the other, ‘for he did not really mean what he said. Ask him yourself; or wait a little, and you will see.’

The carter patted his horses, and they began to strain and pull with all their might.

‘Come up, now!’ he cried, ‘well pulled, my grey beauty! Heaven bless you! the cart is out of the slough!’

‘What did I tell you, brother?’ said the fiend; ‘you see now that the fellow said one thing and meant another; so I gain nothing. Let us go on.’

A little further on they came to the widow’s house.

‘There lives here,’ whispered the summoner, ‘an old hag who would almost as soon lose her life as part with a single penny of her substance. But for all that I will get twelve pence out of her, or else summon her before the court; though to be sure I know no harm of her. Take a lesson from me how to win money.’

He knocked at the widow’s door. ‘Come out, you old vixen!’ he cried.

‘Who knocks?’ said the old woman.

‘Heaven bless you, sir! What is your good pleasure?’

‘I have a writ here,’ said he, ‘which summons-you to appear before the archdeacon’s court to-morrow, to answer certain charges.’

‘Heaven help me!’ said she; ‘I have been ill this long time past, and have such a pain in my side it would be the death of me to travel so far. May not I ask somebody to appear for me, sir summoner, to answer these charges before the court?’

‘Yes,’ said he, ‘if you will pay me—let me see—twelve pence, I will let you off. It leaves little enough profit for me, for it all goes into my master’s pocket. Come, give me the money and let me go. I can wait no longer.’

‘Twelve pence!’ she cried, ‘now our Lady help me! I have not got twelve pence in the world! Have mercy on me,—you know that I am old and poor.’

‘Nay, then,’ said he, ‘the devil take me if I let you off, even though the journey should be the death of you!’

‘Alas!’ she exclaimed, ‘Heaven knows I am guilty of nothing!’

‘Pay me!’ he said, ‘or, by St Anne, I will carry off your new frying-pan in payment for what you owe me for letting you off the last time you were summoned!’.

‘You lie!’ cried she, ‘I was never summoned before your court in all my life before! May the foul fiend take you and the frying-pan together!’

‘Do you mean that, mother?’ asked the fiend.

‘May the foul fiend take him and the frying-pan together,’ she repeated, ‘if he will not repent of his wickedness!’

‘Nay, you old hag! I am not likely to repent,’ the summoner said; ‘I only wish I could strip you of everything you have got, to the very smock on your back!’

‘Now, brother, be not wroth, I pray you,’ said the fiend, ‘henceforth you belong to me; both you and the frying-pan are mine by free gift, and you shall come with me and find out more about us fiends than is known by any doctor of divinity.’

With that he seized the summoner and carried him away to the true home of all summoners.

‘Lordings’ (the Friar continued), ‘had I time I could tell you enough about the pains of that place to make you shudder. But I will add only this: let us all watch against Satan, who will ensnare us if he can; and let us pray heaven to grant all summoners repentance and amendment of life.’

When the Friar had done, the Summoner stood up in his stirrups, shaking with anger like an aspen-leaf.

‘Lordings,’ said he, ‘this Friar boasts that he knows all about hell, and no wonder! For a fiend and a friar are near akin. You have often heard, no doubt, of the friar who was shown hell in a vision, and found it so full of friars that he woke shaking with terror at the thought of his future home. And now I ask you only one thing, that as you have listened to the lies of this knavish Friar, you will now listen to the story I am about to tell you.’

He then told a story about a begging friar of Holderness in Yorkshire, in which he first described the manner in which this friar and his fellow went round collecting money or meal or cheese or bacon or pieces of cloth, or whatever people would give them, writing down their names on an ivory tablet, on pretence of wishing to pray for them, and rubbing the names out as soon as they got away from the house; and then he told how this friar was deluded of a gift which he had expected from a sick man. This story lasted till the company was close upon Sittingbourne.

‘Sir Clerk of Oxford,’ then said our Host, ‘you are riding as shy and silent as a newly

wedded maiden sitting at table. I have not heard your tongue all day. No doubt you are meditating upon some learned matter, but as Solomon says, there is a time for everything, and this is no time or place for study. So be of better cheer, for Heaven's sake; tell us some merry tale; for a man who has entered upon a game must needs play according to the rules. Give us a story of adventure; not a sermon, like a friar in Lent, to make us weep for our sins, nor yet a tale that will send us to sleep; and keep your fine style and flowers of speech for a time when you are writing as men write to kings. Tell your story plainly, I pray you, so that we may all understand it.'

'I am under your orders, Host,' the Clerk answered courteously, 'you are our ruler, and may command me. I will tell you a tale which I learned from a clerk at Padua, whose worthiness was proved both by his words and his deeds. He is dead and nailed up in his coffin now, God rest his soul! His name was Francis Petrarch, that poet laureate who illumined Italy with his poetry as Linian did with his philosophy. But death, who suffers us to dwell on this earth as it were but the twinkling of an eye, has taken them both, as he will take us all in time.

'This Petrarch, from whom I learnt the

story, wrote first an introduction to it, describing Piedmont and the country of Saluce, the range of the Apennines which bounds Western Lombardy, and Mount Vesulus, from which the river Po rises, flowing through Emilia, towards Ferrara and Venice. But this, it seems to me, is unnecessary to the story, and would take long to repeat, so I will go straight to the tale.'

THE CLERK'S TALE OF PATIENT GRISELDA

In the west of Italy, at the foot of Mount Vesulus, there lies a fertile plain, scattered over with many an ancient tower and city. This pleasant tract of country is called Saluce, and a certain young Marquis was lord of it, as his fathers had been before him. His name was Walter; he came of the most noble family in Lombardy; he was handsome, brave, courteous and honourable; he ruled his subjects wisely, and all, rich and poor alike, loved him well and obeyed him willingly. He had only one fault, and that was that he would never take thought for the future, caring for nothing but the pleasure of the moment, and giving himself

up to hawking and hunting. Worst of all, he refused to take a wife.

On this one point his people felt so strongly that at last they went to their lord in a body, and one of them, who had been chosen as spokesman by the rest, thus addressed him:

‘Most noble Marquis,’ he said, ‘your kindness in the past gives us courage to tell you our desire. We love you so well, and your kindness towards us is, and has always been, so great, that there is one thing only that could add to our happiness, and that is your marriage. Bow your neck, my lord, under the happy yoke of wedlock, which makes a man not a slave but a sovereign. Think how quickly life passes; whether we sleep or wake, walk or ride, time still flies, and waits for no man. You are yet in the flower of your youth; but old age will steal silently upon you, and death may surprise you unawares. And if, as God forbid, you should die leaving no heir, your lands would pass to a stranger, which would be a great misfortune to all your subjects. We entreat you therefore to set us free from this fear. Grant our request, and we will choose you a wife from among the noblest ladies in the land, one who will do you honour.’

These humble entreaties filled the Marquis with pity.

‘My own dear people,’ he said, ‘you are urging upon me what I never thought to do. I have always rejoiced in my freedom, and that is seldom found in marriage. You are asking me to exchange my liberty for servitude. Nevertheless, I see that your request is loyally meant, and I trust to your wisdom, as I have always done; and therefore I consent to what you ask. But your offer to choose me a wife I must refuse; that task I will perform myself, trusting to God’s help and guidance in my choice; for children are not always virtuous because they are of gentle birth; goodness is the gift of God alone. To his guidance, then, I commit myself in this matter. Only promise me that, whoever my wife may be, you will honour and reverence her as though she were a king’s daughter: and swear also never to complain of my choice; for, since I am to give up my freedom at your request, I will choose where my heart is fixed; and unless you consent to this, let me hear no more of the matter.’

All this they willingly promised, only begging him, before they departed, to fix an early day for his wedding; for they were still rather afraid that he would take no wife after all. To this also he consented, naming a day for the marriage, for which boon they thanked

him upon their knees, and returned home fully satisfied, while the Marquis gave orders to his household officers to prepare a splendid feast in honour of the wedding.

The Second Part

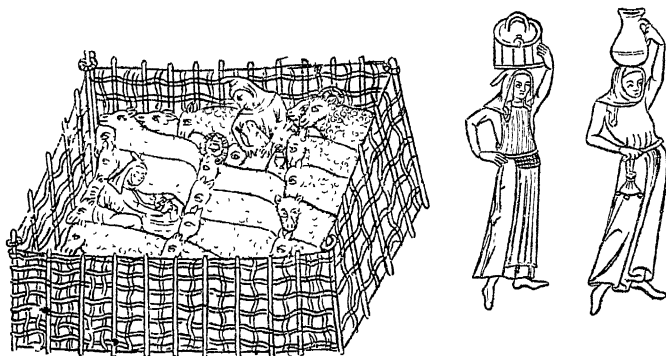
Not far from the palace there was a little village, pleasantly situated; the people who dwelt in it were poor peasants, who kept cattle, and earned their living by tilling the ground;



Sowing

and the poorest among them all was an old man called Janicula. But God can send his grace even into a narrow cattle-stall. Poor though he was, Janicula had a fair daughter named Griselda; fair she was to look upon, and if virtue be beautiful, she was the fairest maiden under the sun; grave and discreet, despite her youth, and a loving and obedient daughter. She had been brought up in poverty, and was frugal and industrious withal. She was

out all day in the fields, spinning while she kept watch over their few sheep, and from morning till night she had not an idle moment. When she came home in the evening, she would bring herbs which she had gathered, to cook for their evening meal. The bed on which she slept was hard, her life was bare of luxuries; she had devoted herself always to



Sheepfold

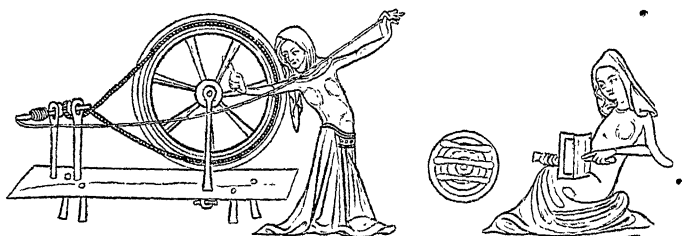
tending her old father with all the obedience and diligence that any child could show.

The Marquis, as he rode out hunting, had often noticed this humble maiden, and had admired her gentle goodness, resolving that if he ever took a wife it should be none but Griselda.

The wedding-day came, but still nobody knew who the bride would be. The people wondered greatly, and whispered to one

another in private that the Marquis was deceiving them, and did not mean to be married at all. Nevertheless Walter had ordered ornaments and jewels to be made for his bride, and robes for the wedding, taking the measure from a maid of the same height as Griselda.

The morning of the wedding-day came, and all was in readiness, the whole palace in bridal array, and a noble feast prepared. Then the Marquis, in rich apparel, with all the



Carding and Spinning

knights of his retinue and the lords and ladies who were invited to the feast, set out with the sound of music towards the village where Griselda lived.

Griselda, little thinking that all this splendour was for her, had gone out to draw water from the well, and was hurrying home as quickly as she could, for she had heard that the Marquis was to be married that day, and she wanted to see the sight.

'I will try to get my work at home done as early as I can,' she thought, 'so that I may have time to stand at the door with my friends and see the bride pass, in case she takes this road to the castle.'

She was just entering her own door when the Marquis drew near to the cottage, and called to her. Setting down her pitcher beside the door-step, she fell upon her knees, and with a serious face awaited his commands.

'Where is your father, Griselda?' the Marquis asked her in grave tones.

'My lord, he is here,' she answered humbly, and went into the cottage and brought out her father to the Marquis, who, taking the old man by the hand, drew him aside.

'Janicula,' he said, 'I can no longer hide the desire of my heart. If you consent, I will take your daughter to be my wife. I know the love you bear to me as my faithful liege; tell me then, are you willing that I should become your son-in-law?'

This sudden question so astonished the old man that he grew red, and stood trembling and bewildered, scarcely able to speak.

'My lord,' he said, 'my will is yours. You are my lord; do as you wish.'

'Then I desire,' the Marquis said gently, 'that you and she and I should talk of the

matter privately within your cottage, for I would ask her whether she is willing to be my wife and to obey me in all things, and this I will do in your presence.'

While the three went into the cottage, the rest of the company stood outside marvelling at the care and tenderness which Griselda showed towards her old father. She herself was pale with wonder, for never before had she seen so much splendour, nor received so noble a guest.

When they had entered the cottage, the Marquis spoke to her.

'Griselda,' he said, 'it is your father's wish and my own that I should wed you, and I think that you will not refuse to do as we desire.' But first I wish you to consider whether you will consent to my conditions. Are you ready to obey me cheerfully in everything, whatever I command, whether it bring you joy or sorrow? And do you promise never to complain against me, or to oppose me by word or look? Swear this, and I will swear to marry you.'

'My lord,' she answered, wondering and trembling at his words, 'I am all unworthy of this honour, but I will do as you desire. Here I swear never in act or thought to disobey you, even though I die for it.'

'It is enough, Griselda mine,' he said, and

he led her gravely out through the cottage door.

‘Here stands my wife,’ he said to the people. ‘Let all who love me honour and love her also.’

Then, that she might not come to his palace dressed in her old clothes, he commanded the ladies of his train to array her in new robes; and though, truth to tell, they were not greatly pleased at having to handle the old clothes she wore, yet they obeyed his commands, attired her fresh from head to heel, combed out her hair, which before had hung rough and unbraided, set a crown upon her head, and decked her with jewels and ornaments. Thus attired in bridal array she looked so beautiful that the people scarcely knew her again. Then the Marquis wedded her with a ring, set her upon a snow-white palfrey, and rode back beside her to the palace, accompanied by a throng of joyful people. Here they spent the rest of the day in revelry and feasting.

Griselda showed herself well worthy of her new estate, and bore herself with as much grace and dignity as though she had been brought up in an Emperor's palace instead of in a poor cottage, so that the people who had known her from childhood could scarcely

believe that she was really old Janicula's daughter. Though she had always been good, yet she had now become so wise, so gracious, so fair of speech, so worthy of all reverence that everyone who saw her loved her. Her fame spread far and wide, so that young and old flocked to Saluce to look upon her.

So Walter, happy in his marriage, lived in peace and prosperity, and because he had seen the goodness which lay hidden under lowly birth, people called him a wise man. Not only could Griselda perform all womanly home duties, but she could also, when the case required, serve the public good; there was no quarrel or complaint among the people which she could not settle, and in the absence of her husband she would settle the disputes between gentlemen of high degree. So great was her wisdom, that the people would say she had been sent from heaven to amend all wrongs.

In course of time a daughter was born to her, and though she would rather have had a boy, yet the Marquis and all the people rejoiced greatly, and hoped that though a girl had come first, the next child might be a son and heir.

The Third Part

While this child was still a baby, a strange desire grew up in Walter's heart to put his wife's obedience to some hard trial. It was a cruel and evil wish, for already he had tested her in many ways, and had found no fault in her, and it ill befits a man to put his wife to needless pain. But the desire grew so strong, that at last he yielded to it, and one night he came to her when she was alone, with a stern and troubled face.

‘Griselda,’ he said, ‘you have not forgotten the day on which I took you from your poor home and raised you to this high estate; you have not forgotten, in the wealth and dignity which you now enjoy, the poverty from which I took you. Listen then, now that we are alone and nobody can overhear us.

‘To me you are very dear, but not to my nobles. It is a shame to them, they say, to be subject to one so meanly born, and this they have said especially since the birth of your child. Now I wish to live at peace with them, as I have always done, so I cannot be regardless of their complaints, but must deal with your child as my people desire. I am unwilling, God knows, to do this thing, and without

your knowledge and consent I will not do it. Show me therefore now that patience and submission which you promised at our marriage.'

To these words Griselda listened in silence, showing no sign of grief.

'My lord,' she said, 'my child and I are yours, and you may deal as you please with your own. Nothing you do can displease me, and I do not desire to keep or fear to lose anything in this world besides yourself. This is my mind, and neither time nor death can change it.'

Walter rejoiced in his heart at her answer, but he feigned an air of deep sorrow, and went sadly out of the room. He had a serving man who loved him well, and had often before proved trustworthy and faithful. To him the Marquis secretly told his plan, and this man, having received his orders, stalked silently into Griselda's room.

'Madam,' he said, 'you must forgive me for carrying out my orders. You know that my lord's commands must be obeyed, however grievous they may be. I am commanded to take away this child.'

Without another word he caught the child out of her arms, and made as though he would slay it upon the spot. Griselda, though she thought the child she loved so much was to be

slain before her eyes, gave no sign of her agony, but sat meek and silent as a lamb, in obedience to her lord's commands. When she spoke at last, she gently entreated the man of his kindness to let her kiss the child before it died. Clasp^{ing} the baby sadly to her breast she kissed and lulled and blessed it.

'Farewell, my babe,' she said in her gentle voice, 'I shall never see thee more. But thy heavenly Father will care for thee, since I have signed thee with the sign of the cross. To his keeping, little one, I commend thy soul, for thou must die to-night.'

Then, turning to the messenger, she said, 'Here is the little maid; take her, and carry out your lord's commands. But one thing I pray you, that unless my lord has forbidden it, you will bury the little body where neither wild beasts nor birds of prey can reach it.'

But the man would give no answer, and went away, carrying the child. Returning to the Marquis he told him all that Griselda had said and done; but Walter, though he felt some remorse, held firmly to his purpose, as headstrong nobles will. He bade the servant swathe the child in soft wrappings and take it with all care and secrecy to his sister at Bologna, the Countess of Panic, beseeching her to bring it up in a manner, befitting its birth,

but to conceal from everybody whose child it was. The man did as he was commanded. Walter meanwhile set himself to watch his wife, to find out if she were changed towards him in look or manner. But she was just the same in every way, as grave and gentle, as cheerful, humble, loving, and ready to serve him as she had been before. No sign of grief appeared in her, and she never spoke of her daughter.

The Fourth Part

Four years passed by, and then she had another child, a son this time, a fair and noble boy, and Walter and all his people rejoiced at the birth of an heir.

When the child was two years old, the desire again came upon Walter to make yet another trial of his wife's patience. 'Wife,' said he, 'you know already that my people hate our marriage, and since my son was born they murmur worse than ever: "When Walter dies," they say, "a peasant's grandson will reign over us." These complaints destroy all my peace, and I have therefore resolved to dispose of your son as I did of his sister. I warn you of this, so that you may be prepared, and may bear it patiently.'

'I have already said,' Griselda replied, 'and shall say always, that I desire only what

you desire. Nothing you command can grieve me, even though my daughter and my son must both be slain. I have had no part nor lot in my two children save grief and pain; we are yours, do as you will with us. For, as when I first came to you I left at home all my clothing, even so I stripped myself of my will and all my freedom. Do your pleasure therefore; in all things I will obey you. If my death would please you, I would gladly die. Compared to your love death is nothing.'

The Marquis cast down his eyes for shame, wondering at her constancy and patience; his heart was full of joy, but he left the room with a stern and gloomy face.

Again the grim-faced servant came to her, as before, and snatched her little son away from her more roughly, if possible, than he had before seized her daughter. Again she submitted patiently, making no complaint, but only kissing her child and signing him with the cross, and again begging the man to bury him where his tender limbs would be safe from beasts of prey. As before, he refused to answer her, and went his way, taking the child with all care to Bologna.

The Marquis wondered at his wife's patience more and more. If he had not known how dearly she loved her children, he would have

thought her indifferent to their fate and hard of heart. But he knew that next to himself she loved them best in all the world. Yet he found no change in her; as time went on, she grew more true and loving, if possible, and more diligent to please him; it seemed that there was but one will between the two of them, for in everything his will was hers.

Meanwhile the rumour spread far and wide that Walter had secretly murdered his two children, because their mother was of low birth. This scandal became common talk, and was generally believed, so that his people, who had formerly loved him so well, grew to hate him as a murderer. But in spite of this he would not be turned from his cruel purpose; he was determined to try his wife still more.

When his daughter was twelve years old, he sent to Rome, and obtained a forged decree, which he pretended came from the Pope, bidding him, for the sake of his people, put away his first wife and marry another. This false decree was published in full, and the people believed that it was true. When the news of it reached Griselda, her heart was very sad; yet she resolved to endure every misfortune patiently, awaiting the good pleasure of her husband, to whom she had given herself heart and soul.

At the same time Walter wrote privately to his sister's husband, the Count of Panic, asking him to bring home his two children openly and with honour; but without disclosing the secret of their birth; requesting him further to give out that the maiden was shortly to be married to the Marquis of Saluce.

The Count did as he was asked. On the day appointed he set out towards Saluce, with a company of lords in rich array to attend the maiden and her young brother who rode beside her. The girl was decked with bright jewels for her marriage, and the boy too, who was now seven years old, was clad as befitted his noble rank. So they rode on their way towards Saluce, with great splendour and rejoicing.

The Fifth Part

Meanwhile the Marquis was resolved, according to his wicked plan, to try his wife's patience to the uttermost; and one day, in the presence of all his court, he addressed her roughly thus:

‘Griselda,’ he said, ‘I was glad enough to marry you; not for your wealth or rank, but for your goodness and obedience. But I now find that there is a servitude in a great position, and that I may not choose a wife as I please,

like any ploughman. My people are urging me every day to take another wife, and to this the Pope, for the sake of peace, has consented. Indeed, my new wife is now upon her way hither. Be brave, therefore, and give place to her; return to your father's house, taking with you the dowry that you brought me, which of my grace I will restore to you. Bear misfortune with patience, remembering that no prosperity can last for ever.'

'My lord,' she answered humbly, 'I know, and I have always known, that there was no comparison between my poverty and your magnificence. I have never held myself worthy to be your wife, no, nor yet your servant. And in this house, where you have made me lady, I take Heaven to witness that I never thought myself its mistress, but have been your humble servant, as I shall ever be until I die. I give thanks to God and to you that you have so long held me in honour and high estate, of which I was all unworthy. There is no more to say. I willingly return to my father, and with him I will live the rest of my days, in the cottage where I was brought up as a child, remaining a widow to my life's end. God give you joy of your new wife! I give place to her readily, and will go whenever it pleases you. But as for the dowry which I brought you, it was

only the old clothes that I was wearing, which would be hard now to find. Dear Heaven! How gentle and how kind you seemed in speech and look upon our wedding-day! But the saying is true, and I have proved it so, that love grown old is love grown cold. Yet be sure, my lord, that whatever befalls me, I shall never repent that I gave you my heart. You know that in my father's cottage you caused me to be stripped of my poor clothes and clad in your rich garments. Here I restore to you my robes and my wedding ring. The rest of your jewels you will find safe in your chamber. Suffer me only to keep the smock which I now wear; for I was once your wife, and you would not wish me, I hope, to go naked from your palace.'

'Keep the smock that you are wearing,' Walter said, and then for very pity went out and left her.

Then before all the people she stripped herself of everything she wore except her smock, and so, barefoot and bareheaded, went forth towards her father's cottage.

The people followed weeping; but she herself shed no tear and spoke no word.

Old Janicula, when he heard the news, lamented the day that he was born; he had always distrusted the marriage, fearing that

the Marquis would at last grow to despise Griselda for her low birth, and would cast her off. Now, hearing the noise of the people approaching, the poor old man hurried out weeping to meet his daughter, and tried to cover her with the old dress which she had worn before her marriage. But it would no longer serve her, for the cloth was poor, and was now rotten with age.

Such was Griselda's home-coming; and so for a time she lived with her father, humble and gentle as she had always been, and never showing either by word or look any resentment against her lot or remembrance of her former high estate. People talk of the patience of Job; but in patience and in constancy what man can compare with a woman?

The Sixth Part

The Count of Panic now drew near to Saluce, and the news spread far and wide among the people that he was bringing with him the new bride, with such pomp and splendour as had never been seen before in all West Lombardy.

Shortly before the Count's arrival Walter sent for poor Griselda, who came humbly and cheerfully at his command, and knelt before him.

‘Griselda,’ he said, ‘it is my wish that this maiden who is to be my wife should be received to-morrow as royally as possible; but I have no woman who can set the palace in order and make arrangements for entertaining my guests as I desire. So I have sent for you to make all these preparations, since you know of old what pleases me; and though your dress is poor and ragged, you can at least perform this duty.’

‘My lord, I will obey you gladly,’ she said, ‘my desire is always to serve and please you as well as I can; for never, whether in weal or woe, shall I cease to love you with my whole heart.’

With that she began her task of setting the house in order; she saw that the rooms were arranged, the tables laid, and the beds made, hastened the servants over their sweeping and dusting, and herself worked harder than any of them, until the whole palace was prepared for the guests.

The next morning the Count of Panic arrived, bringing with him the two noble children. All the people thronged to look at the splendid sight, and when they saw the beauty of the girl, they told each other that Walter was no fool, and had done well in his choice of a new wife, for she was younger and fairer than Griselda, and of high birth besides,

and her brother too was so handsome it was a pleasure to look at him. The common people, always changeable and fickle as a weathercock, now, as they gazed at the procession, praised the Marquis as much as they had blamed him before, pleased at the novelty of having a new lady for their town, and regardless of the reproaches of the more sober citizens.

Meanwhile Griselda, having made everything ready for the feast, cheerfully went with the rest to the palace gate to greet the bride, nowise ashamed of her poor ragged clothes. She received the guests courteously, each according to his rank, while they wondered who this was, who in spite of her poor clothes, showed herself so courteous and skilful a hostess. And she meanwhile was full of praise for the beauty of the maiden and her brother.

At last, when they had all sat down to the feast, Walter called out to her as she busied herself about the banqueting-hall.

‘Griselda,’ he cried, in a jesting way, ‘how do you like the looks of my new wife?’

‘Right well, my lord,’ said she, ‘in faith, I have never seen a lovelier maiden; and I pray that you may both have happiness and good fortune to your lives’ end. Only one thing I ask of you; do not torment her as in

the past you did another in her place, for she is more gently nurtured, and could not, I think, bear hardship so well as one brought up in poverty.'

When Walter saw her so patient and cheerful, bearing no malice for all the wrong he had done her, he repented at last of his cruelty.

'It is enough, my Griselda,' he said; 'be not unhappy any more. I have proved your goodness and faithfulness both in poverty and wealth, and now I know your steadfastness, dear wife.'

Then taking her into his arms he kissed her; but she stood amazed, like one startled out of sleep, too much bewildered to understand what he had said.

'Griselda, you only are my wife,' he said: 'this maiden, whom you took to be my bride, is your daughter, and this is your son, and shall be my heir. They have been kept and brought up secretly at Bologna. Take them back again, and see for yourself that they are both safe. And to all who have thought me cruel and evil I here declare that I wished only to prove your constancy. I never meant to slay my children—God forbid!—but only to keep them hidden until I had proved you beyond all doubt.'

At his words Griselda swooned away for

joy; when she came to herself again, she called her children to her, and folding them in her arms she embraced and kissed them with all a mother's tenderness, weeping piteously all the while.

'I thank you, my lord, with all my heart,' she said, 'for keeping my dear children safe. I care not though I die to-day, since you still love me. Oh, my dear little ones, your unhappy mother never dreamt but that you had been devoured by wild beasts; but by the mercy of God and by your father's kindness you are safe.'

Then suddenly she fell fainting again, with her children clasped so closely in her embrace that it was difficult to loose them from her arms. Walter raised her up and comforted her, while tears ran down the faces of all who looked on; and when at last she recovered from her swoon, everyone rejoiced and tried to cheer her until she had regained her tranquillity. Walter above all was diligent to please her; and it was good to see their joy at being once more together.

Then the ladies led her away to her chamber, where they took off her poor clothes, and having dressed her in shining cloth of gold and set a jewelled crown upon her head, they brought her back to the banqueting-hall, where she was honoured as she deserved.

Thus had this sad day a happy ending, for

the whole company gave themselves up to mirth and revelry until the stars shone out, and the feasting was more splendid and costly than on Griselda's wedding-day.

For many years these two lived together in happiness and prosperity. Old Janicula was brought to the palace, where he spent the rest of his days in peace. Walter married his daughter to one of the most noble lords of Italy; after his death his son succeeded to the heritage of Saluce, and was happy in his marriage, though he never put his wife to such great tests, for men are not so hardy now as once they were.

Now the moral of this story is not that wives ought to follow the example of Griselda's meekness—that would be neither possible nor desirable—but that we should learn from her example how to bear adversity; for if a woman showed such patience towards a mortal man, how much more ought we to bear patiently all that God sends us! Is it not very right and fitting that he should prove his creatures? In truth he proves us every day, and suffers us often to be scourged by adversity; and this chastening is for our profit, not for the discovery of our frailty, which he knew long before we were born. Let us then bear with patience all that God sends us in this life.

By this tale the Merchant was moved to remark what a great difference there was between the patience of Griselda and the spirit shown by his own wife, who was a shrew, if ever there was one. He had been married only two months, he said, but if he were once loosed from the snare, he would never enter into it again.

The Host agreed that women were always as busy as bees in the task of plaguing men, but preferred not to say much of his own wife's many faults, for fear it should be repeated to her by some of the company.

THE FOURTH DAY

‘Sir Squire, draw near, I pray you,’ said the Host, ‘and tell us a tale of love. I warrant you know as much about the subject as any man alive!’

The Squire promised to do his best, and related the following story.

THE SQUIRE'S TALE OF CAMBUSCAN

In the City of Sarai, in the land of Tartary, there once lived a great king named Cambuscan, renowned in war, and possessed of every kingly virtue. He had two sons, Algarsyf and Cambalo, and a daughter named Canacé, who was as beautiful as the day.

One day, when Cambuscan was holding his birthday feast with solemn state according to his custom, the board richly spread and his minstrels playing before him, there suddenly

rode into the banqueting-hall a knight in armour, mounted upon a horse of brass. In his hand he carried a great mirror, on his thumb he wore a golden ring, and a naked sword hung at his side. He rode up to the high table, and saluting the king and queen, delivered his message. He came, he said, from the king of Arabia and India, bearing greetings and gifts to honour Cambuscan's feast-day.

'This magic horse of brass,' he said, 'will carry you through the air wherever you desire to go; this sword which hangs at my side has power to cleave the stoutest armour, and the wounds inflicted by it can only be healed by being touched with the flat of its blade. This mirror, together with the ring you see upon my hand, my master sends to the lady Canacé, your daughter. The mirror has this magic virtue, that it gives warning of future danger, and will show any fair lady whether her lover be true to her. The ring will enable the wearer to understand and to speak the language of birds, and will also teach her the healing virtue of every herb that grows.'

When the knight had finished speaking, he rode out of the hall, and alighted in the courtyard. Here he left the brazen horse standing, shining like the sun, while he himself was led in to the feast. All the people of the city gathered

together to stare at the wonderful horse, and to talk about the magic gifts which the knight had brought, disputing and discussing among themselves how such marvels could be. Meanwhile within the palace the evening passed in great festivity, with music, feasting and dancing.

But Canacé, who went early to rest, could scarcely sleep for thinking of her magic ring and mirror. Very early the next morning she arose, and went out with some of her ladies to walk abroad, rejoicing in the beauty of the sunrise and in the song of the birds, which she was now able to understand. Presently, as she walked, she saw perched in the bare white branches of a dead tree a falcon, which was crying aloud and tearing herself with her beak so that the blood flowed down. Canacé, filled with pity, hastened towards the tree, and was just in time to pick up the bird as it fell from the bough, swooning from loss of blood.

When the falcon recovered from her swoon, she told Canacé her story; how she had given her heart to a tercelet, who had feigned to be the most ardent of lovers, but had cruelly deserted her at last for the sake of a kite, breaking his troth to her and leaving her forlorn. Canacé, filled with pity at this story, carried the falcon home with her, tended her wounds with salves of herbs, and kept her in

her own chamber in a cage hung inside with blue velvet, which is the colour of truth, and painted outside with green, the colour of inconstancy.

So let us leave them, until it is time to tell how the falcon got her repentant lover back again by the help of Canacé's brother; but we will pass first to the adventures of Cambuscan, and to the perils Algarsyf went through in winning Theodora for his wife, and how he was helped by the horse of brass. And after that I will tell you of Cambalo, who fought for Canacé in the lists against her two brothers.

* * * * *

The Franklin praised the tale of the Squire, and said that he would give better than twenty pounds' worth of land if his own son were a young man of such discretion and virtue: instead of that he spent his time in dice-playing, and cared nothing for the converse of gentlemen.

'A fig for gentlemen!' said the Host, 'remember, sir Franklin, that you have a tale to tell, and say on without more words.'

'Gladly, sir Host,' said he, and, having asked to be excused for his rudeness of speech and lack of rhetoric, he told a tale from one of the old lays which the Bretons made and sang

long ago, of a fair lady named Dorigen, and how a young squire loved her, and sought by means of magic arts to win her away from her own knight and lord, but in the end repented, proving by his deed that a squire may act as nobly as any knight.

When it came to the Doctor's turn, he told the sad story of Virginia, the beautiful Roman maiden who was slain by her father to save her from the clutches of the villains who unjustly claimed her as their slave. The Host, when it was finished, cried out in pity at the tragic fate of this beautiful and innocent young girl, and with many oaths denounced the villainy of those who brought it about. His heart ached, he said, at the tale, and he must either have a draught of fresh ale to raise his spirits, or else hear a cheerful story at once.

'Come now, friend Pardoner!' said he, 'begin at once; tell us a merry tale, something to make us laugh.'

'With all my heart,' he replied, 'only let me have a drink of ale and a bite of bread at this next tavern, and you shall hear as merry a tale as your heart can desire.'

But the more gently bred of the company cried out against this, suspecting that his wit might prove too broad for their liking.

‘Tell us no ribald tale,’ they said, ‘but a story with a good moral to it, and we will listen willingly.’

‘Just as you please,’ the Pardoner replied, ‘I will try to recall one while I am drinking.’

Having refreshed himself, he promised to relate a story which he often brought into his sermons; but first of all he gave them an account of his manner of preaching. He knew his sermons by heart, he said, and delivered them in tones as full and ringing as a bell; and they were always upon the same text, ‘The love of money is the root of all evil.’ He began, when he first got into the pulpit, by telling the people where he came from, showing his pardons and indulgences, and first of all the Pope’s own seal upon his patent, so that nobody might venture to interfere with his preaching. Then, after a short discourse, which he flavoured with a few words of Latin in order to impress his hearers, he displayed his long glass boxes crammed full of old rags and bones, which he pretended were relics of saints, and together with these the shoulder-bone of a sheep, declaring that the water of any well in which this bone was washed was a sovereign remedy for cattle suffering from snake-bite or disease; and, moreover, that if any man would drink fasting of this water before cock-crow every

week; his cattle and his goods should be increased. He showed a mitten, too, promising that if anyone put his hand into it, his crops should be multiplied, provided, of course, that he made an offering at the same time. But of one thing he was accustomed to give his hearers solemn warning; that if any person in the church had committed a crime so horrible that he dared not for shame own it in confession, such a one would be unable to make an offering to these holy relics. All those who were guiltless of such sin he urged to come up and make their offerings, promising to give them absolution by the authority committed to him by the Pope. He boasted that by this device, taking one year with another, he had gained a hundred marks a year since he became a pardoner; and he described how he deceived the simple folk to whom he preached with a hundred more such lying tales, employing all his eloquence to persuade them to part with their money, nodding this way and that from his pulpit like a pigeon sitting on a barn roof, gesticulating with his hands and busy with his tongue. In order to gain the more, he always preached against covetousness, the very sin of which he was guilty himself, urging his hearers to repent of it, not because he cared for the good of their souls, but simply with an eye to his own

advantage. ‘Do you really suppose,’ said he, ‘that so long as I can get money by my preaching I will live in voluntary poverty? No, no, not I! You don’t find me following the example of the Apostles, labouring with my hands or making baskets for a living, while I am able to live in idleness. I must have money, wool, cheese and wheat, yes, and good wine to drink into the bargain, even though the poor go short to give it me. However, I can tell a story with a good moral to it, though I may not be a moral man myself; and now that I have had a draught of fresh ale, I will tell you one which I hope may be to your liking. Now, listen.’

THE PARDONER’S TALE OF THE THREE REVELLERS

Once upon a time, in a certain city of Flanders, there lived a company of young men, who spent all their time in riotous amusements, dining, dancing and drinking in taverns, squandering their money, and giving themselves over to drunkenness, gluttony and swearing. Terrible sins, indeed, are these; gluttony, whereby our first parents lost us Eden; drunkenness, which so deprives men of their wits that after three draughts of Spanish wine they hardly

know whether they be in Cheapside or at Cadiz; and swearing, which, as everybody knows, is clean contrary to holy writ! Hear what befell these roisterers.

One morning, before the earliest bell had rung for prime, these three graceless young men had already sat down in a tavern to drink. Presently, as they sat there, they heard a bell go clinking along the street in front of a corpse which was being carried by for burial, and one of the three called out to his servant-lad, bidding him run and find out the name of the dead man.

‘No need for that, sir,’ said the boy, ‘I was told two hours ago. It is an old comrade of yours, who, as he lay drunk last night on his tavern bench, was struck down all of a sudden by that old rascal whom they call Death. He is very strong in these parts, and has carried off more than a thousand during this pestilence time; if you will be advised by me, master, you will take warning and prepare yourself. Forewarned is forearmed; that is what my mother used to tell me.’

‘Ay, by Saint Mary, the boy speaks the truth,’ the tavern-keeper said: ‘there is a village not a mile off, where in the last year Death has struck down so many, men, women and children, that I think he must have taken up his abode there. You had best beware of him, truly.’

‘What?’ cried the reveller, with a tipsy laugh, ‘is he so dangerous a fellow? I warrant I’ll soon hunt him out and put an end to his mischief. See here, comrades, we three are all of a mind. Let us take a solemn oath together, here and now, to slay this villain whom they call Death before another day be done.’

Together the three agreed with many a horrid oath to kill Death, if they could catch him, and started out at once in a drunken rage to hunt for him in the village of which the tavern-keeper had told them.

Scarce half a mile upon their way they chanced to meet with a poor and aged man, who humbly saluting them gave them God speed.

‘Ill betide you, fellow!’ cried the most insolent of the young men, ‘what do you mean by creeping about like this, muffled up to the eyes? Why do you live on so long, old fool?’

‘I live on thus,’ the old man replied, looking him in the face, ‘because however far I wander through the world, I find no man who will give me his youth in exchange for my age. Neither, alas, will Death take pity upon me; and therefore I wander on, knocking with my staff upon the ground, and praying my mother Earth to let me in. “Dear mother,” I cry to her, “see how my body wastes away! Alas, when shall my

bones find rest? Gladly would I barter all my worldly goods for a hair-cloth shroud to lay me down in." But still she refuses me that boon, and therefore my face is pale and withered as you see. But, sirs, it is unseemly in you to speak so roughly to an old man who has done you no harm either in word or deed. Rather should you honour the aged, as holy writ commands, and treat an old man as you would wish men to treat you when you are old. Now, fare you well, for I must wend my way.'

'Stay, old fellow!' cried the gamester, 'you shall not get off so easily, I swear! See here, you spoke just now of the traitor Death, who is killing off all our friends in these parts. Now, I'll be bound that you are one of his spies, and in league with him to slay us young folk. So tell us where he is, you old rascal, or you shall pay for it!'

'Sirs,' the old man replied, 'if you are so anxious to meet with Death, turn up this crooked path; for in yonder wood I passed him by, and there, by my faith, he awaits your coming, nor will he flee from you for all your threats. Do you see yonder oak? There you will find him. God keep you, and make you better men!'

Off ran the three swashbucklers full speed towards the oak; and when they reached it,

there they beheld, piled up beneath it, a great heap of shining florins. They reckoned them at close on eight bushels, all bright gold, fresh from the mint. In their joy at this fair sight they forgot all about their search for Death, and sat down to gloat over the treasure.

The worst of the three was the first to break silence.

‘Comrades,’ he said, ‘listen to me; for, though I often talk nonsense, I can talk sound sense when I choose. Fortune has sent us this treasure so that we may lead a life of jollity and ease, and we will spend it as lightly as we have come by it. Who would have guessed, when we set out to-day, that we should come by so fair a fortune? If this gold were safely carried away to my house or to yours—for of course it all belongs to us—then should we be happy men indeed. But by day this cannot be done, lest men should say that we have stolen it, and hang us for taking what is our own. So I propose that we draw lots, and that he on whom the lot falls shall go with all speed to the town and bring us bread and wine, while the other two keep watch over the treasure; then, when night falls, we will carry it away as secretly as we can to whatever place we agree upon.’

To this plan they consented, and the lot fell

upon the youngest, who started off at once to the town, leaving his two fellows to guard the treasure. As soon as he was gone, the one who had first spoken turned to the other.

‘Listen to me, comrade,’ he said, ‘you and I are sworn brothers, and I will tell you what is to your advantage. Here is our comrade gone, and here is the heap of gold, which is to be divided among us three. Now, if I could so contrive that you and I alone share it between us, should I not be doing you a good turn?’

‘Why, yes, but how can we manage it?’ said the other; ‘he knows that the gold is in our keeping. What could we say to him?’

‘If you will keep it secret,’ returned the first villain, ‘I will tell you in a few words how it can be managed.’

‘Agreed,’ said the other, ‘I will not betray you.’

‘Well, then,’ said the first, ‘there are two of us, and two are stronger than one. When he comes back, as soon as he has sat down, do you go across to him, and catch hold of him as though to wrestle with him in sport; then, while you are struggling with him, I will stab him through the side with my dagger, and you must do the same with yours: after that, dear friend, we will divide the gold between us; then we shall both be able to carry out all our

desires, and to dice and drink to our hearts' content.'

To this plan the two villains agreed.

The youngest, meanwhile, on his way to the town, turned the new and shining florins over and over again in his thoughts. 'If only,' he said, 'I might have the whole of this treasure



Wrestling

to myself, there is no man under heaven should live so merry a life as I!' And at last the devil put into his head the idea of poisoning his two comrades, and thus gaining possession of the whole. Hurrying on to the town, he sought out an apothecary, and asked him for some poison, saying that he wanted to rid himself of

rats ; there was a pole-cat, too, he said, which had been carrying off his fowls.

‘ I can give you a poison,’ the apothécary said, ‘ so deadly that even a morsel as small as a grain of wheat will destroy any living creature in a shorter time than you would take to walk a mile.’

The villain took away the poison in a box, and then, hurrying to a man in the next street, he borrowed from him three large wine-bottles ; into two of them he put the poison, while the third he kept for his own use, for he meant to labour all night carrying away the gold. Then, when he had filled the three great bottles with wine, he returned to his comrades.

What need to make a long story of it ? Just as they had planned, so it fell out ; they slêw him, and that swiftly. When it was done, the one said to the other, ‘ Now let us sit down and drink and be merry, before we put him into his grave.’

With the word he took up, as it chanced, one of the bottles of poisoned wine, and drank of it, and gave it to his comrade to drink, so that they both died a horrible death. Thus perished these three murderers.

And now, dear brethren (so I proceed), be warned, I pray you, by this terrible example, and flee the sin of avarice. My pardon will

save you all, provided that you make offerings according to your means; give nobles or pounds sterling or whatever else you will—silver brooches, rings, or spoons. Come up, ye women, and offer of your wool! Here I inscribe your names upon my roll; you shall enter into the bliss of heaven.

This is how I tell the tale, sirs, when I preach; but there is one thing more I ought



Silver noble, Edward III

to say. Here in my wallet I carry relics as fair as any in England, given me by the Pope's own hand. If any of you desire, out of the devotion of your hearts, to make offering and have absolution from me now, kneel down here in the road, and I will give it you; you may take pardon fresh and fresh at every mile's end, provided you offer your pence and nobles fresh and fresh, good money and true. It is an advantage to every one of you to have so good

a pardoner to absolve you as you ride, in case of accidents which may happen upon the way. Peradventure one or another of you may fall from his horse and break his neck: see how great a security it is to you that I am fallen in with your company, who am able to shrive you against the hour of death. And I advise that our Host here should begin first, for he is the most deeply involved in sin. Come forward, sir Host, make offering without delay, and you shall kiss every one of my relics, yes, even for one groat. Make haste to unbuckle your purse!

‘Nay, nay,’ said the Host with an oath, ‘that I will not, I swear. Let be, let be!’ And he went on to abuse the Pardoner roundly, and to make mock of his relics. So angry was the Pardoner that he answered never a word; but the worthy Knight, seeing that all the company were laughing, intervened to make peace.

‘No more of this,’ he said, ‘we have had enough of it. Be of good cheer, sir Pardoner; and you, sir Host, who are right dear to me, kiss the Pardoner and make peace, I pray you. Draw near, Pardoner, and let us laugh and be merry again as before.’

So they kissed, and rode forward upon their way.

The Nun who accompanied the Prioress had related the legend of Saint Cecilia, a high-born Roman maiden who suffered martyrdom for her faith, and we had just reached Boughton-under-Blee, when a man overtook us, who was dressed in black, with a white surplice underneath, and was mounted on a dapple-gray horse all covered with sweat, as if it had been ridden very fast; so too was the horse that his Yeoman rode, which was flecked with foam and so exhausted that it could hardly go. The stranger had a wallet laid across the crupper of his saddle; he rode light, it seemed, carrying little with him, and I wondered who he might be, till I saw that his cloak was sewn to his hood, and then I judged him to be some Canon. His hat hung down behind him by a cord, and under his hood he had a burdock-leaf for coolness; but in spite of that, the perspiration was running down fast from his forehead.

‘God save this merry company!’ he cried, when he came up with us, ‘I have ridden fast to overtake you and to ride with you.’

His Yeoman too greeted us courteously. ‘I saw you ride from your inn this morning, sirs,’ he said, ‘and told my master, who is fond of company and conversation.’

The Host bade them welcome, and suggested that the Canon should tell a tale;

whereupon the Yeoman began to boast how clever his master was, and how by his art he could if he chose pave the whole road from



The Canon's Yeoman

there to Canterbury with silver and gold. The Host asked why, if that was so, he did not dress rather better, and the Yeoman replied

that, as a matter of fact, his master was rather too clever, and when things were overdone they did not turn out so well. They lived, he said, very privately, hardly daring to show themselves abroad. He himself was employed to blow the fire, while his master pursued experiments in alchemy, trying to multiply gold, but as yet without success. Meanwhile they kept on borrowing gold on pretence of making two pounds out of one, which they always had good hope of doing, but never did. The science seemed always to escape them, and he was afraid they would be made beggars by it at last.

All this conversation was between the Yeoman and the Host apart; but while they were talking, the Canon drew near and, over-hearing what the Yeoman was saying, tried to silence him. But the Host urged him to go on with his story, and not mind his master's threats; so the Canon, seeing that all his tricks would be exposed, fled away for very shame, and left the company altogether. The Canon's Yeoman cursed him, and offered, now that he was gone, to tell the whole story of his impostures. He had been with him seven years, and had lost by him all that ever he had, and so had many other people, besides having his face discoloured and his eyesight ruined

by the fire and the fumes of metals. Indeed, he had not only lost all his own money in these experiments, but had borrowed so much from other people, that he would never all his life be out of debt. He told of the various operations of this craft and the materials used in it, and how when their hopes were highest, some accident would happen, such as the breaking of the pot which contained the metals, which made all their efforts useless. He proceeded then to tell a story of the way in which a certain Canon, not his master but another, had cheated an unfortunate priest by such pretences as these, first gaining his confidence by repaying what he borrowed, and then deceiving him by a fraudulent experiment, so as to make him think that he saw first quicksilver and then copper changed into silver by the action of a certain powder, for the secret of which he then induced the priest to pay a large sum. Whatever might be thought of the philosopher's stone itself, this Yeoman was sure that the search after it led to nothing but misery and emptying of purses; and he advised all to avoid meddling with it, as they valued their happiness.

By this time we had come to the hamlet called Bob-up-and-down, near Blean Forest on the Canterbury road. It was here that our Host,

turning round, saw that the Cook had fallen fast asleep as he rode, and was nodding as though he would tumble off his horse. Calling upon the company to wake him up, the Host vowed that he should tell a story by way of a penance.

‘Wake up, Cook!’ he cried, ‘are you drunk, that you cannot hold up your head?’

The Cook, who was very pale, declared that he did not know how it was, but such a drowsiness had come over him, that he would sooner go to sleep than drink of the best wine in Cheapside. The Manciple thereupon accused him of being drunk, which made him very angry; and for want of words he began to nod his head at the Manciple, until he suddenly fell off his horse. There he lay, until he was picked up; and there was much trouble, and a great deal of shoving to and fro, before he could be hoisted into the saddle again, so unwieldy was he. The Manciple protested that he was too drunk to tell a story, and offered to tell one himself instead. ‘He has more than enough to do,’ said he, ‘to keep himself and his horse out of the slough; and if he falls off, it will be as much as we shall all be able to do to lift up his heavy, drunken body.’

‘Take care, Manciple,’ said the Host, ‘if you are too severe in rebuking him for his vices,

another time he may repay you by calling your accounts into question; and that would never do.'

'No, indeed,' replied the Manciple, 'he might easily get me into trouble in that way. I would sooner pay for the mare he rides than have a quarrel with him. I will not make him angry; all that I said was spoken in jest. See, I have a draught of good wine here in a gourd, which I warrant he will not refuse!'

In truth the Cook drank of it willingly, though he had drunk quite enough already; and when he had finished drinking, he gave the gourd back to the Manciple, thanking him as best he was able. Our Host laughed aloud.

'I see plainly that we must needs carry good wine with us wherever we go,' said he, 'for it will turn anger and discord into love and peace, and right all wrongs. Thanks be to Bacchus, that can so change earnest into jest! Now, Manciple, tell your tale.'

The Manciple told the old fable of how crows became black. In old days, when Phœbus, the sun-god, lived upon earth, he had a snow-white crow, which he had taught to speak, and which could sing, too, better than a nightingale. This crow told him one day that his wife, whom he dearly loved, was deceiving him, and only pretended to love him, while really she loved

another man, a mean and worthless fellow, who used to come to see her when Phœbus was absent. Phœbus was so angry when he heard this, that he set an arrow in his bow and shot his wife dead; but when he had done this he was overcome by sorrow for the deed, and turning upon the crow he cursed him for having been the cause of his violence by falsely accusing his dear wife. As a punishment, he said, the crow's voice should be changed into a harsh cry, and his white feathers should be black; and from that time forward all crows have been black. The Manciple ended his tale by repeating the wise maxims taught him by his mother, as, for example, that many have been ruined by talking too much, but few by talking too little, that as a sword cuts an arm in two, so the tongue cuts friendship, that where there is little talk, there is much peace, that what is said is said and can by no means be recalled, and that by incautious speech we often make ourselves the slaves of others. 'Therefore, my son,' she would say, 'remember the crow and keep well your tongue.'

It was now about four o'clock, to judge by the sun; and, our journey being nearly at an end, our Host addressed us thus: 'Lordings, our game is almost done. All the tales but one have been told. Now, sir Priest,—vicar or

rector, whichever you may be—everyone has told his tale but you. Unbuckle your wallet, and let us see what you have in it. Tell us a fable without delay.’

‘Nay,’ said the Parson, ‘you will get no fable from me; for Saint Paul writing to Timothy bids him “refuse profane and old wives’ fables.” Why should I sow chaff when I might sow grain? Moreover, I am a Southern man and I cannot play with letters, as they do in the North, nor do I think much better of rhyme. But, if you please, I will give you a discourse in prose, to end this game. Jesus Christ send me the wit to show you, upon this journey, the way of pilgrimage towards the heavenly Jerusalem!’

We all agreed to his proposal, for it seemed to us good to end with something virtuous, and to give him a hearing. Our Host, voicing our request, bade the Parson say on, promising that we would all listen.

‘But, since the sun is low,’ he said, ‘let your sermon be short as well as fruitful.’

The Parson’s discourse was a sermon on the Seven Deadly Sins, their causes, and their remedies, and upon the joys of Heaven which await true penitents who, by toil, humility, and death to sin in this world may purchase rest and glory and eternal life in the kingdom of bliss.

Here ends this book of the Tales of Canterbury, compiled by Geoffrey Chaucer, on whose soul may Jesus Christ have mercy. Amen.



Geoffrey Chaucer

NOTES

(The figures refer to pages.)

1. Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral in December, 1171. Pilgrimages to his shrine were very popular in the fourteenth century.

2. The Knight had fought first for his king, and may have been at the battles of Crecy and Poitiers; in the intervals of the king's wars he had taken part in the Crusades against infidels in Asia, Africa and Europe. He had fought against the Moors in Spain, and had been at the capture of Algezir in 1344; he had fought in the Moorish kingdom of Tramysene in Africa, and he had been at the siege of Alexandria by Pierre de Lusignan, king of Cyprus, in 1365. He had served under the same king in Asia Minor and in Armenia. Again he had served in Prussia with the knights of the Teutonic Order, who were constantly at war with the heathens of Russia and Lithuania.

4. 'his horses': that is, the horse which he rode himself and those of his son and yeoman.

5. A Squire was a young man in training for knighthood, attached to the service of a knight, in this case his father. It was one of the regular duties of a squire to carve at table.

6. A bracer is the guard worn by an archer on his left arm, to protect it from the bow-string when the arrow is let go.

Saint Christopher was the patron saint of all field sports, so a forester and archer like the Yeoman would be specially likely to wear his image. The figure of Saint Christopher was supposed to protect its wearer from danger.

The French taught at the convent school near Stratford-le-Bow, where presumably the Prioress had been educated, was Anglo-Norman French, such as had been spoken in England since the days of the Conquest. It naturally differed from Parisian French.

It was still the Court language, though it was gradually being superseded by English.

6. It was specially important that the Prioress should be a person of good manners, because girls of good families were often educated in a nunnery, and courtly manners were an essential part of their training.

Saint Loy : that is, Saint Eligius, a French bishop, of whom it is recorded that he could not be induced to swear on any consideration ; so if the Prioress swore at all, it was only by a saint who objected to swearing.

8. The 'gawdies,' or 'gauds,' were the larger beads of the rosary, made more ornamental than the others, and used for counting the 'Pater Nosters,' while the smaller size served for 'Aves'

'Amor vincit omnia' ('Love overcometh all things') : the motto is from Virgil, 'Omnia vincit amor.'

9. 'three priests.' The mention of three priests here is rather puzzling ; for it seems to be implied afterwards that there was but one ; and only one is required to make up the total number of the company.

'another Nun.' It was the custom in a Benedictine convent to choose a nun to attend upon the Prioress as her chaplain.

The Monk, though not an Abbot, is represented as being Prior of a 'Cell,' that is a smaller house dependent upon the larger Monastery. The discipline of such houses was often less strict than the Rule required. It was a complaint constantly brought against monks at that time that they neglected study and devotion, spending all their time in field sports and other amusements ; that in disregard of their rule of poverty they dressed richly and extravagantly ; and that they rode abroad wherever they pleased without leave of their Superior, staying away from their monastery on business or pleasure as long as they liked. Monks were of course quite different from friars, whose business was in the world, and not in a monastery, and who were supposed to support themselves by begging, instead of living on rich endowments.

10. 'as Augustine bids.' A Rule ascribed to St Augustine, prescribing active work as a part of monastic life, was adopted by many religious houses.

The Friar. The four orders of Friars were the Franciscans (Grey Friars), Dominicans (Black Friars), Carmelites (White Friars) and Augustinians (Austin Friars). This was probably a Franciscan. He is described as a 'limitour,' that is he had a fixed round within

certain limits, where he was licensed to preach and to beg for the benefit of his house. In the Summoner's Tale a lively picture is given of a friar going round to houses and collecting contributions in money and in kind, cake or cheese, a piece of brawn or a portion of a blanket, bacon or beef, or anything else he could get, while a sturdy fellow with a sack followed him to carry home what was contributed. Another friar accompanied him with a pair of ivory tablets, on which he put down the names of the givers, promising to pray for them, but rubbing out the names again as soon as ever he was out of sight. Perpetual quarrels were carried on between the friars and the parish priests, because the friars claimed the right of hearing confessions and otherwise interfering with the functions of the secular clergy.

11. 'his tippet.' The tippet was a scarf which could be worn as a hood; the Friar's tippet may have had pockets in the ends, in which knives and trinkets could be carried.

12. 'Love-days' were days appointed for the settlement of disputes among neighbours by arbitration. On such occasions the Friar would sometimes perhaps be chosen as arbitrator; or he would help to bring the disputants to an agreement.

The keeping of the sea between Middleburgh on the coast of Holland and the river Orwell, at the mouth of which the port of Harwich stands, would be of importance as guarding the trade route between England and the Continent from pirates. The wool-staple was fixed at Middleburgh from 1384 to 1388, and therefore during those years it was an especially important place for English trade.

13. 'The Clerk of Oxford.' The term 'clerk' originally meant one who was in orders: but since scholarship in the earlier Middle Ages was almost entirely confined to the clergy, the word came to be an equivalent for 'scholar.' The Clerk of Oxford, it is implied, was in orders, though he had as yet no benefice. It was not unusual for poor students at medieval universities to live upon the charity of their friends.

'though he was a philosopher.' Chaucer is referring ironically to the search made by so-called 'philosophers,' that is alchemists, for the means of multiplying gold (see The Canon's Yeoman's Tale).

14. 'Sergeant' means properly 'servant,' and 'Sergeant at Law' was the title given to those barristers who were appointed by the king to be his servants in legal matters. Such lawyers were often enabled by their high position to acquire great wealth.

15. The Franklin was in fact a country squire, of considerable wealth and importance.

St Julian, according to legend, having accidentally killed his parents, founded a house of entertainment for travellers, by way of atonement, and became renowned for his hospitality.

16. Guilds played an important part in middle-class English life in the fourteenth century; some were craft-guilds, others were simply social and religious, being benefit and burial societies which admitted persons of various occupations.

17. The Doctor's knowledge of astronomy is ironically noted by Chaucer as the basis of his professional skill.

John of Gatesden, who died in 1361, was almost a contemporary of Chaucer.

'gold is a cordial.' Medicine containing gold was prescribed for affections of the heart. There is a touch of irony in the suggestion that the Doctor's love of gold arose only from the fact that it was useful as a medicine.

18. The Flemish weavers of Ypres and Ghent were famous for their skill; many of them came over to settle in England in the reign of Edward III.

'the offering.' The congregation used to go up to the altar to offer their alms, the order in which they went being decided by rank and importance.

19. The head-dress at that time was often of great size and weight, and richly ornamented.

The marriage ceremony used to be performed at the church-porch, after which the married couple entered the church, and Mass was celebrated.

The excursions of the Wife of Bath give a striking idea of the extent to which pilgrimages had been developed in the fourteenth century as an excuse for travel.

'a Parson of a parish.' The stipends of parish priests at that time were often extremely small, so that many of them were tempted to desert their country parishes, letting their benefices out to hire, while they went up to London to make money by singing masses for the dead, or engaging in the service of some guild or fraternity. This charge is brought against them by Langland, Gower, and other contemporary writers. Chaucer's poor Parson, however, is a striking contrast to such priests.

'lay a curse.' Excommunication would be the ordinary remedy when tithes were not paid punctually.

20. 'a chantry.' Money was often left by will to pay a priest to sing masses and say prayers for the repose of a soul. Such an endowment was called a chantry. There were many priests employed in this way at St Paul's Cathedral.

22. 'won the ram.' A ram was the regular prize at country wrestling matches.

23. 'a thumb of gold.' The proverb was, 'An honest miller has a thumb of gold,' because a miller constantly tested the quality of his flour as it was ground by rubbing it between his thumb and forefinger. Hence the skill by which an honest miller made his profit depended largely upon his thumb. A dishonest miller had, of course, other sources of profit; but it is implied here that this particular miller, though dishonest, was also skilful, and made profit both ways.

A Manciple was a servant who had the charge of buying provisions for a college or inn-of-court.

25. Reeve the steward or bailiff of an estate. The Reeve's name was Oswald, as we afterwards learn in the course of conversation.

Scot is said to be still a common name for a horse in Norfolk. It is the name of one of the horses in the Friar's Tale.

The Summoner was an official employed to summon offenders to appear before the bishop or archdeacon at the diocesan court, which dealt with the offences over which the Church had jurisdiction, such as witchcraft, usury, withholding tithes, neglect of the Sacraments, and various forms of immorality. This gave him great opportunities of influence and of exacting bribes and blackmail. See the account of the Summoner in the Friar's Tale.

27. A 'Significavit' was the writ issued by the king's court at the request of the bishop, for committing a man to prison when he proved obstinate under excommunication. It was so called from the opening words, 'Significavit nobis venerabilis pater.. Episcopus, etc.'

A Pardoner was a seller of pardons or indulgences. In confession a penitent, as a condition of receiving absolution, would have a certain penance assigned to him by the priest; but in the fourteenth century the performance of this penance might be commuted into the payment of a sum of money, and the certificate that this money had been paid was called a 'pardon,' or 'indulgence.' This system led to great abuses; the sellers of pardons would also collect money by displaying so-called 'relics,' and persuading people to do reverence to them. This Pardoner gives a full and frank account of himself in the Prologue to his Tale.

27. of Rounceival . probably the Hospital of St Mary, Rounceval, at Charing.

A vernicle was a tiny reproduction of St Veronica's kerchief, a relic preserved in St Peter's Church at Rome : the legend is that it was miraculously impressed with a portrait of the face of Christ. A vernicle was often worn as a token by pilgrims who had been to Rome.

28. The offertory here referred to must have been an anthem sung, not while the offerings were made, but just before the address to the people, which was intended to stimulate their liberality.

29. The name of the Host was Harry Bailly, as we learn later, in the conversation between him and the Cook

31. The watering-place of St Thomas was a place where travellers used to water their horses, about two miles out on the Canterbury Road

33. The plot of the Knight's Tale was taken from the *Teseide*, a long poem by Boccaccio, but in Chaucer's version it is much altered and abridged, and far superior in dramatic interest to Boccaccio's story. Though the setting of the story is classical, and the plot is founded upon the old Greek legends which centre round the hero Theseus, yet the Knight's Tale is thoroughly medieval in tone and spirit : the love of Palamon and Arcite for Emily, their single combat in the wood, and the tournament in the lists, are all essentially characteristic of the chivalrous ideals of the Middle Ages.

36. A surcoat was a vest embroidered with heraldic devices, worn over the armour.

44. 'the winged god Mercury.' Mercury was the messenger of the gods; he was usually represented with wings on his feet, a broad-brimmed hat on his head, and a staff in his hand, the story is that he lulled the hundred-eyed Argus to sleep and then slew him.

46. May Day was universally observed as a festival in medieval England. Cf. Stow's *Surrey of London* : 'In the month of May, namely, on May Day in the morning, every man except impediment would walk into the sweet meadows and green woods, there to rejoice their spirits with the beauty and savour of sweet flowers, and with the harmony of birds, praising God in their kind.' It was the custom for all who could, to go out before the dawn to gather green boughs and flowers to deck themselves, their houses, the May-pole and the church.

63. Knights of retinue were the knights in attendance upon the great lords.

It was part of a squire's duty to arm his lord and to nail his pennon to his lance, a strap through which the knight would pass his arm was fastened to the back of a shield.

77. The Man of Law's Tale is taken from an Anglo-Norman Chronicle, where it is given as authentic history. The date of it is fixed by that of the Emperor Mauricius, son of Constance according to this story, A.D. 582—602. The tale is told also by Gower.

85. Alla was King of Northumberland A.D. 560—588.

92. 'his Senator.' In mediæval Rome the chief magistrate was called the Senator, and the title is here transferred to the sixth century and supposed to belong to the Emperor's chief officer.

95. 'Loller,' like 'lollard,' was a term of reproach applied to the followers of Wycliffe, who were known to object to the profane oaths which were in common use at the time. The two words were originally distinct, but were confused together: 'loller' means properly 'lounger,' 'idle vagabond.'

96. A Jews' quarter was a common feature of a mediæval town. The feeling against Jews was very bitter: the practice of usury, by which they profited, was forbidden by canon law.

97. St Nicholas was famed in legend for his infant piety. He is the patron saint of school-boys.

'*Alma Redemptoris*.' This is a hymn which will be found in the Roman Breviary as part of the Service of Compline from Advent to the Purification. The first words of the hymn are '*Alma Redemptoris Mater*,' 'Gentle Mother of the Redeemer.'

101. Hugh of Lincoln was a boy said to have been murdered by the Jews at Lincoln in 1255; he was afterwards held in reverence as a saint and martyr.

102. The Rime of Sir Thopas is written in ridicule of the popular style of metrical romances, and reproduces their commonplace metre and impossible adventures with hardly any exaggeration.

105. King Pedro of Spain, generally known as Pedro the Cruel, came to the throne of Castile in 1350, and in 1369 was stabbed to death in a struggle with his half-brother, who was waging civil war against him. The Black Prince fought on Pedro's side in this war, and John of Gaunt married Pedro's daughter, so Chaucer's sympathies were naturally with him, in spite of his atrocious cruelties.

Bernabò Visconti, duke of Milan, died in prison in 1385. This is the latest historical event mentioned in the Canterbury Tales.

The story of Count Ugolino is told in Dante's *Inferno*, Canto xxxiii.

107. 'Sir John' was commonly used as a nick-name for a priest.

111. 'Cato.' This is not the best known Cato, but Diosysius Cato, a writer of proverbial philosophy in Latin hexameter verse, about the third century A.D.

117. Jack Straw was one of the leaders in the Peasants' Rising, in 1381, when the peasants marched upon London to demand redress for their wrongs, fired and sacked many houses, and murdered many of the Flemings and other aliens living in the city. The terrific shouting of the rebels is mentioned by historians of the time; and Chaucer had probably been an eye-witness of the events.

119. 'a young clerk of Oxford.' See note to the Clerk of Oxford in the Prologue. Here it means simply a student of the University of Oxford.

121. 'Who painted the lion?' The saying refers to the fable of the painter who, having painted a picture of a man triumphant over a lion he had killed, showed it to a lion as a proof of man's supremacy. 'Yes,' said the lion, 'but who painted it? If lions could paint, they would show a very different picture.'

129. 'Dante.' This refers to a passage in Dante's *Purgatorio*, Canto vii.

133. See note on the Summoner in the Prologue.

142. Petrarch, who died in 1374, wrote the story of Griselda in Latin prose, taking it from the last story of Boccaccio's *Decamerone*. Chaucer follows Petrarch, but introduces some alterations and additions of his own.

Linian. i.e. Giovanni di Lignano, a famous professor of Canon Law, who died in 1383, only a few years before this was written.

143. 'Saluce,' that is Saluzzo. 'Mount Vesulus' is Monte Viso, the most prominent peak of the Alps to the west of Piedmont.

169. The Squire's Tale is evidently founded upon an Arabian tale of magic. It was left unfinished, and is the story referred to by Milton in *Il Penseroso*, when he expresses the desire to

'call up him that left half told
The story of Cambuscan bold,
Of Camball, and of Algarsife,
And who had Canace to wife,
That own'd the virtuous ring and glass,
And of the wondrous horse of brass,
On which the Tartar king did ride.'

The suggestion is of course that the poet should be called up to complete the unfinished tale. We may note that Chaucer's

pronunciation of the name 'Cambuscan' is different from Milton's and more correct. The name is Cambus Khan, and Chaucer pronounces it Cambuscán, with the accent on the last syllable.

174. The Pardoner's 'patent' was the document by which he was licensed to sell pardons and to preach.

177. 'prime'. a canonical office of the Church, appointed to be said about 6 a.m.

A hand-bell used to be rung by the sexton in front of the corpse at a funeral.

186. Boughton-under-Blee. a village near Blean Forest, about five miles from Canterbury.

The Canon must by his dress have been an Augustinian canon, member of a religious order which had a house at Canterbury.

188. The so-called science of alchemy was founded on the idea that the metals had some common basis and might probably be transmuted one into another, if the proper chemical means could be discovered. The experiments tried by alchemists in pursuit of this secret led to all sorts of fraud and trickery, such as is described in the Canon's Yeoman's Tale; but they were also the occasion of real discoveries in chemistry.

191. The Manciple's Tale is from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and as told by Chaucer shows a curious mixture of classical mythology and modern manners.

193. 'play with letters': an allusion to the old alliterative poetry, which was at this time produced especially in the north of England. The Parson says:

'I am a southren man,
I can not geste "*run, ram, raf*," by lettre.'

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